

THE FLYING MAIL

OLD OLAF

RAILROAD AND CHURCHYARD

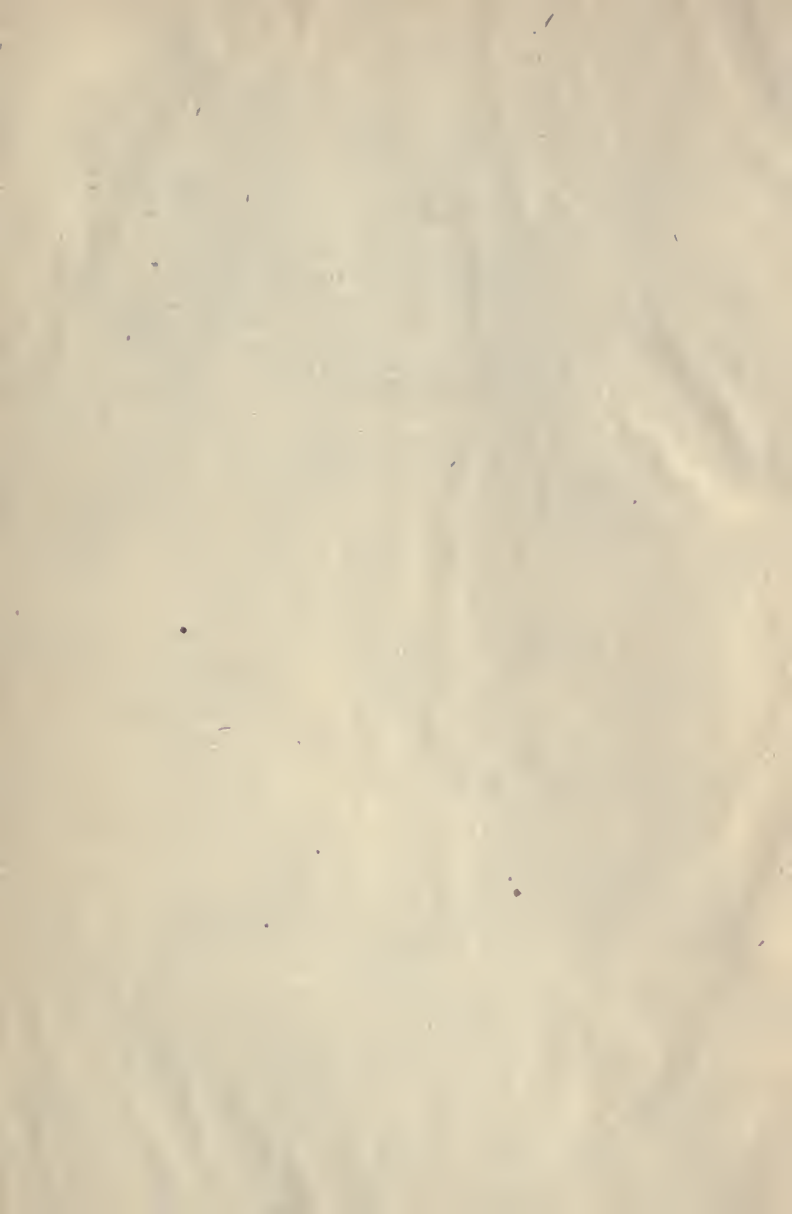


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THE FLYING MAIL

By M. GOLDSCHMIDT

OLD OLAF

By MAGDALENE THORESEN

THE RAILROAD AND THE CHURCHYARD

By BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON

TRANSLATED BY CARL LARSEN

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PREFACE.

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OF the three writers whose sketches are here presented, Björnson is the only one known to American readers. Mrs. Magdalene Thoresen has gained a very high reputation in Norway as a writer of stories of common life. She is of Danish origin, but is a Norwegian by residence; and Norway claims the honor of her name. Goldschmidt is a Dane, and is very famous in his own country as an author; but none of his writings have before this been translated into English, as far as known.

These stories have been selected from a volume entitled "Wintergreen," composed of tales, sketches, and poetry, by different authors. Although differing from each other in their intended effect, and in many important points, they are all marked by that vigorous boldness and simplicity of style, that forcible conciseness of expression, which seem to be characteristic of many Scandinavian writers. Descriptions of scenery, too, when they occur, are

effected, not by any tricks of words, but by the spontaneous outpourings of a strong love of nature, simply and briefly expressed.

There are added two short sketches by Björnson, the “Eagle’s Nest” and “The Father,” which may not be without interest to some readers. These are republished from an English translation by Sivert and Elizabeth Hjerleid.





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THE FLYING MAIL.

FROM THE DANISH OF M. GOLDSCHMIDT.





THE FLYING MAIL.

I.

FRITZ BAGGER had just been admitted to the bar. He had come home and entered his room, seeking rest. All his mental faculties were now relaxed after their recent exertion, and a long-restrained power was awakened. He had reached a crisis in life: the future lay before him,—the future, the future! What was it to be? He was twenty-four years old, and could turn himself whichever way he pleased, let fancy run to any line of the compass. Out upon the horizon, he saw little rose-colored clouds, and nothing therein but a certain undefined bliss. He put his hands over his eyes, and sought to bring this uncertainty into clear vision; and after a long time had elapsed, he said: “Yes, and so one marries.”

“Yes, one marries,” he continued, after a pause; “but whom?”

His thoughts now took a more direct course; but the pictures in his mind’s eye had not become plainer. Again the horizon widely around was rose-colored, and between the tinted cloud-layers angel-heads peeped out,—not Bible angels, which are neither man nor woman;

but angelic girls, whom he didn't know, and who didn't know him. The truth was, he didn't know anybody to whom he could give his heart, but longed, with a certain twenty-four-year power for her to whom he could offer it, — her who was worthy to receive his whole self-made being, and in exchange give him all that queer imagined bliss, which is or ought to be in the world, as every one so firmly believes.

“Oh, I am a fool!” he said, as he suddenly became conscious that he was merely dreaming and wishing. He tried to think of something practical, thought upon a little picnic that was to be held in the evening; but the same dream returned and overpowered him, because the season of spring was in him, because life thrilled in him as in trees and plants when the spring sun shines.

He leaned upon the window-seat — it was in an attic — and let the wind cool his forehead. But while the wind refreshed, the street itself gave his mind new nourishment. Down there it moved, to him unknown, and veiled and hidden as at a masquerade. What a treasure might not that easy virgin foot carry! What a fancy might there not be moving in the head under that little bonnet, and what a heart might there not be beating under the folds of that shawl! But, too, all this preciousness might belong to another.

Alas! yes, there were certainly many amiable ones down there! — and if destiny should lead him to one of them, who was free, lovely, well-bred, of good family, could any one vouch that for her sake he was not giving up *Her*, the beau-ideal, the expected, whose portrait had shown itself between the tinted clouds? or, in any event, who could vouch for one's success in not missing the right one?

“Oh! life is a lottery, a cruel lottery; for to everybody

there is but one drawing, and the whole man is at stake. Woe to the loser ! ”

After the expiration of some time, Fritz, under the influence of these meditations, had become melancholy, and all bright, smiling, and sure as life had recently appeared to him, so misty, uncertain, and painful it now appeared. For the second time he stroked his forehead, shook these thoughts from him, seeking more practical ones, and for the second time it terminated in going to the window and gazing out.

A whirlwind filled the street, slamming gates and doors, shaking windows and carrying dust with it up to his attic chamber. He was in the act of drawing back, when he saw a little piece of paper whirled in the dust cloud coming closely near him. He shut his eyes to keep out the dust, grasping at random for the paper, which he caught. At the same moment the whirlwind ceased, and the sky was again clear. This appeared to him ominous: the scrap of paper had certainly a meaning to him, a meaning for him; the unknown whom he had not really spoken to, yet had been so exceedingly busy with, could not quite accidentally have thus conveyed this to his hands, and with throbbing heart he retired from the window to read the message.

One side of the paper was blank; in the left-hand corner of the other side was written, “beloved,” and a little below it seemed as if there had been a signature, but now there was nothing left excepting the letters “geb.”

“ ‘Geb,’ what does that mean ? ” asked Fritz Bagger, with dark humor. “ If it had been gek, I could have understood it, although it were incorrectly written. Geb, Geb-rer, Algebra, Gebrüderbuh, — I am a big fool.”

“ But it is no matter, she shall have an answer,” he shouted after a while, and seated himself to write a long,

glowing love-letter. When it was finished and read, he tore it in pieces.

“No,” said he, “if destiny has intended the least thing by acting to me as mail-carrier through the window, let me act reasonably.” He wrote on a little piece of paper :

“As the old Norwegians, when they went to Iceland, threw their high-seat pillars into the sea with the resolution to settle where they should go ashore, so I send this out. My faith follows after ; and it is my conviction that where this alights, I shall one day come, and salute you as my chosen, as my ——.” “Yes, now what more shall I add?” he asked himself. “Ay, as my — ‘geb’ — !” he added, with an outburst of merry humor, that just completed the whole sentimental outburst. He went to the window and threw the paper out : it alighted with a slow quivering. He was already afraid that it would go directly down into the ditch ; but then a breeze came lifting it almost up to himself again, then a new current carried it away, lifting it higher and higher, whirling it, till at last it disappeared from his sight in continual ascension, so he thought.

“After all, I have become engaged to-day,” he said to himself, with a certain quiet humor, and yet impressed by a feeling that he had really given himself to the unknown.





II.

SIX years had passed, and Fritz Bagger had made his mark, although not as a lover. He had become Counsellor, and was particularly distinguished for the skill and energy with which he brought criminals to confession. It is thus that a man of fine and poetic feelings can satisfy himself in such a business, for a time at least: with the half of his soul he can lead a life which to himself and others seems entire only because it is busy, because it keeps him at work, and fills him with a consciousness of accomplishing something practical and good. There is a youthful working power, which needs not to look sharply out into the future for a particular aim of feeling or desire. This power itself, by the mere effort to keep in a given place, is for such an organization, every day, an aim, a relish; and one can for a number of years drive business so energetically, that he, too, slips over that difficult time which in every twenty-four hours threatens to meet him, the time between work and sleep, twilight, when the other half of the soul strives to awaken.

Be it because his professional duties gave him no time or opportunity for courtship, or for some other reason, Fritz Bagger remained a bachelor; and a bachelor with the income of his profession is looked upon as a rich man. Counsellor Bagger would, when business allowed enter into social life, treating it in that elegant, independent, almost poetic manner, which in most cases is denied

to married men, and which is one reason why they press the hand of a bachelor with a sigh, a mixture of envy, admiration, and compassion. If we add here that a bachelor with such a professional income is the possible stepping-stone to an advantageous marriage, it is easily seen that Fritz Bagger was much sought for in company. He went, too, into it as often as allowed by his legal duties, from which he would hasten in the black "swallow tail" to a dinner or *soirée*, and often amused himself where most others were weary; because conversation about any thing whatever with the cultivated was to him a refreshment, and because he brought with him a good appetite and good humor, resting upon conscientious work. He could show interest in divers trifles, because in their nothingness (quite contrary to the trifles in which half an hour previous with painful interest he had ferreted out crime) they appeared to him as belonging to an innocent, childish world; and if conversation approached more earnest things, he spoke freely, and evidently gave himself quite up to the subject, letting the whole surface of his soul flow out. And this procured him friendship and reputation.

In this way, then, six years had slipped by, when Counsellor Bagger, or rather Fritz Bagger as we will call him, in remembrance of his examination-day, and his notes by the flying mail, was invited to a wedding-party on the shooting-ground. The company was not very large, — only thirty couples, — but very elegant. Bagger was a friend in the families of both bride and bridegroom, and consequently being well known to nearly all present he felt himself as among friends gathered by a mutual joy, and was more than usually animated. A superb wine, which the bride's father had himself brought, crowned their spirits with the last perfect wreath. Although the toast to the bridal pair had been officially

proposed, Bagger took occasion to offer his congratulations in a second encomium of love and matrimony; which gave a solid, prosaic man opportunity for the witty remark and hearty wish that so distinguished a practical office-holder as Counsellor Bagger would carry his fine theories upon matrimony into practice. The toast was drunk with enthusiasm, and just at that moment a strong wind shook the windows, and burst open one of the doors, blowing so far into the hall as to cause the lights to flicker much.

Bagger became, through the influence of the wine, the company, and the sight of the happy bridal pair, six years younger. His soul was carried away from criminal and police courts, and found itself on high, as in the attic chamber, with a vision of the small tinted clouds and the angel-heads. The sudden gust of wind carried him quite back to the moment when he sent out his note as the Norwegian heroes their high-seat pillars: the spirit of his twenty-fourth year came wholly over him, queerly mixed with the half-regretful reflection of the thirtieth year, with fun, inclination to talk and to breathe; and he exclaimed, as he rose to acknowledge the toast, —

“I am engaged.”

“Ay! ay! Congratulate! congratulate!” sounded from all sides.

“This gust of wind, which nearly extinguished the lights, brought me a message from my betrothed!”

“What?” “What is it?” asked the company, their heads at that moment not in the least condition for guessing charades.

“Counsellor Bagger, have you, like the Doge of Venice, betrothed yourself to the sea or storm?” asked the bridegroom.

"Hear him, the fortunate! sitting upon the golden doorstep to the kingdom of Love! Let him surmise and guess all that concerns Cupid, for he has obtained the inspiration, the genial sympathy," exclaimed Bagger. "Yes," he continued, "just like the Doge of Venice, but not as aristocratic! From my attic chamber, where I sat on my examination-day, guided by Cupid, in a manner which it would take too long to narrate, I gave to the whirlwind a love-letter, and at any moment *She* can step forward with my letter, my promise, and demand me soul and body."

"Who is it then?" asked bridegroom and bride, with the most earnest interest.

"Yes, how can I tell that? Do I know the whirlwind's roads?"

"Was the letter signed with your name?"

"No; but don't you think I will acknowledge my handwriting?" replied Bagger, quite earnestly.

This earnestness with reference to an obligation which no one understood, became comical; and Bagger felt at the moment that he was on the brink of the ridiculous. Trying to collect himself, he said,—

"Is it not an obligation we all have? Do not both bride and bridegroom acknowledge that long before they knew each other the obligation was present?"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the bridegroom.

"And the whirlwind, accident, the unknown power brought them together so that the obligation was re-deemed."

"Yes, yes!"

"Let us, then," continued Bagger, "drink a toast to the wind, the accident, the moving power, unknown and yet controlling. To those of us who, as yet, are unprovided for and under forty, it will at some time undoubt-

edly bring a bride; to those who are already provided for will come the expected in another form. So a toast to the wind, that came in here and flickered the lights; to the unknown, that brings us the wished for; and to ourselves, that we may be prepared to receive it when announced."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the bridegroom, looking upon his bride.

"Puh-h-h!" thought Bagger, seating himself with intense relief, "I have come out of it somewhat decently after all. The deuce take me before I again express a sentimentality."

How Counsellor Bagger that night could have fallen asleep, between memory, or longing and discontent, is difficult to tell, had he not on his arrival home found a package of papers, an interesting theft case. He sat down instantly to read, and day dawned ere they were finished. His last thought, before his eyelids closed, was, — Two years in the House of Correction.





III.

A MONTH later, toward the close of September, two ladies, twenty or twenty-two years of age, were walking in a garden about ten miles from Copenhagen. Although the walks were quite wide, impediments in them made it difficult for the ladies to go side by side. The autumn showed itself uneven and jagged. The currant and gooseberry boughs, that earlier hung in soft arches, now projected stiffly forth, catching in the ladies' dresses; branches from plum and apple trees hung bare and broken, and required attention above also. One of the ladies apparently was at home there: this was evident partly from her dress, which, although elegant, was domestic, and partly by her taking the lead and paying honor, by drawing boughs and branches aside, holding them until the other lady, who was more showily dressed, had slipped past. On account of the hindrances of the walk there were none of those easy, subdued, familiar conversations, which otherwise so naturally arise when young ladies, acquaintances, or "friends," visit each other, and from the house slip out alone into garden or wood. An attentive observer meanwhile, by scrutinizing the physiognomy of both, would, perhaps, have come to the conclusion, that even if these two had been together on the most unobstructed road, no confidence would have arisen between them, and would have suspected the hostess of trying to atone for her lack of interest, by being

polite and careful. She was not strikingly handsome, but possessed of a fine nature, which manifested itself in the whole figure, and perhaps, especially, in the uncommonly well formed nose ; yet it was by peering into her eyes, that one first obtained the idea of a womanhood somewhat superior to the generality of her sex. Their expression was not to be caught at once : they told of both meditation and resolve, and hinted at irony or badinage, which works so queerly when it comes from deep ground. The other lady was "burgherly-genteel," a handsome, cultivated girl, had certainly also some soul, but yet was far less busy with a world in her own heart than with the world of fashion. It was about the world, the world of Copenhagen, that Miss Brandt at this moment was giving Miss Hjelm an account, interrupted by the boughs and branches, and although Miss Hjelm was not, nun-like, indifferent either to fashions or incidents in high life, the manner in which Miss Brandt unmistakably laid her soul therein, caused her to go thus politely before.

"But you have heard about Emmy Ibsen's marriage?" asked Miss Brandt.

"Yes : it was about a month ago, I think."

"Yes : I was bridesmaid."

"Indeed !" said Miss Hjelm, in a voice which atoned for her brevity.

"The party was at the shooting-ground."

"So !" said Miss Hjelm again, with as correct an intonation as if she had learned it for "I don't care." — "Take care, Miss Brandt," she added, stooping to avoid an apple-branch.

"Take care? — oh, for that branch !" said Miss Brandt, and avoided it as charmingly and coquettishly as if it had been living.

"It was very gay," she added, "even more so than

wedding-parties commonly are ; but this was caused a good deal by Counsellor Bagger."

"So !"

"Yes: he was very gay. . . . I was his companion at table."

"Ah !"

"Oh, only to think ! at the table he stands up declaring that he is engaged."

"Was his lady present?"

"No: that she was not, I think. Do you know who it was?"

"No: how should I know that, Miss Brandt?"

"The whirlwind !"

"The whirlwind?"

"Yes. He said that he, as a young man, in a solemn moment had sent his love-letter or his promise out with the wind, and he was continually waiting for an answer: he had given his promise, was betrothed ! — Ou !"

"What is it?" asked Miss Hjelm, sympathetically. The truth was, the young hostess at this moment had relaxed her polite care, and a limb of a gooseberry-bush had struck against Miss Brandt's ankle.

The pain was soon over ; and the two ladies, who now had reached the termination of the walk, turned toward the house side by side, each protecting herself, unconscious that any change had occurred.

"But I hardly believe it," continued Miss Brandt: "he said it perhaps only to make himself conspicuous, for certain gentlemen are just as coquettish as . . . as they accuse us of being."

Miss Hjelm uttered a doubting, "Um !"

"Yes: that they really are ! Have you ever seen any lady as coquettish as an actor?"

"I don't know any of them, but I should suppose an actress might be."

“No : no actress I have ever met of the better sort was really coquettish. I don’t know how it is with them, but I believe they have overcome coquettishness.”

“But you think, then, Counsellor Bang is coquettish?”

“Not Bang — Bagger. — Yes ; for although he said he had this romantic love for a fairy, he often does court to modest earthly ladies. He is properly somewhat of a flirt.”

“That is unbecoming an old man.”

“Yes ; but he is not old.”

“Oh !” said Miss Hjelm, laughing : “I have only known one war counsellor, and he was old ; so I thought of all war counsellors as old.”

“Yes ; but Counsellor Bagger is not war counsellor, but a real Superior Court Counsellor.”

“Oh, how earnest that is ! And so he is in love with a fairy !”

“Yes : it is ridiculous !” said Miss Brandt, laughing. During this conversation they had reached the house, and Miss Brandt complained that something was yet pricking her ankle. They went into Miss Hjelm’s room, and here a thorn was discovered and taken out.

“How pretty and cosey this room really is !” said Miss Brandt, looking around. “In a situation like this one can surely live in the country summer and winter. Out with us at Taarback it blows in through the windows, doors, and very walls.”

“That must be bad in a whirlwind.”

“Yes — yes : still it might be quite amusing when the whirlwind carried such billets : not that one would care for them ; yet they might be interesting for a while.”

“Oh, yes ! perhaps.”

“Yes: how do you think a young girl would like it, when there came from Heaven a billet, in which one pledged himself to her for time and eternity?”

“That isn’t easy to say; but I don’t believe the occurrence quite so uncommon. A friend of mine once had such a billet blown to her, and she presented me with it.”

“Does one give such things away? Have you the billet?”

“I will look for it,” answered Miss Hjelm; and surely enough, after longer search in the sewing-table, in drawers and small boxes, than was really necessary, she found it. Miss Brandt read it, taking care not to remark that it very much appeared to her as if it resembled the one the counsellor had mentioned.

“And such a billet one gives away!” she said after a pause.

“Yes: will you have it?” asked Miss Hjelm, as though after a sudden resolution.

Miss Brandt’s first impulse was an eager acceptance; but she checked herself almost as quickly, and answered:

“Oh, yes, thank you, as a curiosity.” Then slowly put it between her glove and hand.

As Miss Brandt and her company rode away, said Miss Hjelm’s cousin, a handsome, middle-aged widow, to her:

“How is it, Ingeborg? It appears to me you laugh with one eye and weep with the other.”

“Yes: a soap-bubble has burst for me, and glitters, maybe, for another.”

“You know I seldom understand the sentimental enigmas: can you not interpret your words?”

“Yes: to-day an illusion has vanished, that had lasted for six years.”

“For six years?” said her cousin, with an inquiring or sympathizing look. “So it began when you were hardly sixteen years.”

“Now do you believe, that when I was in my sixteenth year I saw an ideal of a man, and was enamoured of him, and to-day I hear that he is married.”

“No: I don’t know as I believe just that,” answered the cousin, dropping her eyes; “but I suppose that then you had a pretty vision, and have carried it along with you in silence — and with faith.”

“But it was something more than a vision: it was a letter, a love-letter.”

The cousin looked upon Ingeborg so inquiringly, so anxiously, that words were unnecessary. Beside this the cousin knew, that when Ingeborg was inclined to talk, she did so without being asked, and if she wished to be silent, she was silent.

Ingeborg continued: “One time, I drove to town with sainted father. Father was to go no further than to Noerrebro, and I had an errand at Vestervold. So I stepped out and went through the Love-path. As I came to the corner of the path, and the Ladegaardsway, the wind blew so violently against me, that I could hardly breathe; and something blew against my veil, fluttering with wings like a humming-bird. I tried to drive it away, for it blinded one of my eyes; but it blew back again. So I caught it and was going to let it fly away over my head, but that moment I saw it was written upon, and read it. It was a love-letter! A man wrote that he sent this as in old times the Norwegian emigrants let their high-seat pillars be carried by the sea, and where it came he would one time come, and bring his faith to his destined ‘*Geb.*’”

“‘Geb.’? What is that?” asked the cousin.

"That is Ingeborg," answered Miss Hjelm, with a plain simplicity, showing how deeply she had believed in the earnestness of the message.

"It was really remarkable!" said the cousin, and added with a smile which perhaps was somewhat ironical: "And did you then resolve to remain unmarried, until the unknown letter-writer should come and redeem his vow?"

"I will not say that," answered Ingeborg, who quickly became more guarded; "but the letter perhaps contained some stronger requirements than under the circumstances could be fulfilled."

"So! and now?"

"Now I have presented the letter to Miss Brandt."

"You gave it away? Why?"

"Because I learned that the man, who perhaps or probably wrote it in his youth, has spoken about it publicly, and is counsellor in one of the courts."

"Oh, I understand," said the cousin, half audibly: "when the ideal is found out to be a counsellor, then" —

"Then it is not an ideal any longer? No. The whole had been spoiled by being fumbled in public. I would get away from the temptation to think of him. Do court to him, announce myself to him as the happy finder, — I could not."

"That I understand very well," said the cousin, putting her arm affectionately around Ingeborg's waist; "but why did you just give Miss Brandt the letter?"

"Because she is acquainted with the counsellor, and indeed, as far as I could understand, feels somewhat for him. They two can get each other; and what a wonderful consecration it will be, when she on the marriage-day gives him the letter!"

The cousin said musingly: "And such secrets can live in one whole year, without another surmising it! Sud-

denly she added: "But how will Miss Brandt on that occasion interpret the word 'Geb'?"

"Oh! I suppose a single syllable is of no consequence; and, besides, Miss Brandt is a judicious girl," answered Ingeborg, with an inexpressible flash in the dark eyes.





IV.

GOOD fortune seldom comes singly. One morning Criminal and Court Counsellor Bagger got, at his residence at Noerre Street, official intelligence that from the first of next month he was transferred to the King's Court, and in grace was promoted to be veritable counsellor of justice there; rank, fourth-class, number three. As gratified by this friendly smile from above, he went out to repair to the court-house, he met in the porch a postman, who delivered him a letter. With thoughts yet busy with new title and court, Counsellor Bagger broke the letter, but remained as if fixed to the ground. In it he read:—

“The high-seat pillars have come on shore.

“—‘GEB.’—”

One says well, that a man's love or season of courtship lasts till his thirtieth year, and after that time he is ambitious; but it is not always so, and with Counsellor Bagger it was in all respects the contrary. His ambition was already, if not fully reached, yet in some degree satisfied. The faculty of love had not been at all employed, and the letter came like a spark in a powder-cask: it ran glowing through every nerve. The youthful half of his soul, which had slept within him, wakened with such sudden, revolutionary strength, that the other half soul, which until now had borne rule, became completely subject; yes, so wholly,

that Counsellor Bagger went past the court-house and came down in Court-house Street without noticing it. Suddenly he missed the big building with the pillars and inscription: "With law shall Lands be built;" looked around confused, and turned back.

So much was he still at this moment Criminal Examiner, that among the first thoughts or feelings which the mysterious letter excited in him was this: it can be a trick, a foolery. But in the next moment it occurred to him, that never to any living soul had he mentioned his bold figure of the high-seat pillars, and still less revealed the mysterious, to him so valued, syllable — geb —. No doubt could exist: the fine, perfumed paper, the delicate lady handwriting, and the few, significant words testified, that the billet which once in youthful, sanguine longing, he had intrusted to the winds of Heaven, had come to a lady, and that in one way or another she had found him out. He remembered very well, that a single time, five or six weeks before, he had in a numerous company mentioned that incident, and he did not doubt that the story had extended itself as ripples do, when one throws a stone into the water; but where in the whole town, or indeed land, had the ripple hit the exact point? He looked again at the envelope. It bore the stamp of the Copenhagen city mail: that was all. But that showed with some probability that the writer lived in Copenhagen, and maybe at this moment she looked down upon him from one of the many windows; for now he stood by the fountain. There was something in the paper, the handwriting, or more properly perhaps in the secrecy, that made her seem young, spirited, beautiful, piquant. There was something fairy-like, exalted, intoxicating, in the feeling that the object of the longing and hope of his youth had been under the protection of a good spirit, and that the

great unknown had taken care of and prepared for him a companion, a wife, just at the moment when he had become Counsellor of Justice of the Superior Court. But who was she? This was the only thing painful in the affair; but this intriguing annoyance was not to be avoided, if the lady was to remain within her sphere, surrounded by respect and esteem.

“What would I have thought of a lady, a woman, who came straight forward and handed out the billet, saying: ‘Here I am?’” he asked himself, at the moment when at last he had found the court-house stairs and was ascending.

How it fared that day with the examinations is recorded in criminal and police-court documents; but a veil is thrown over it in consideration of the fact, that a man only once in his life is made Counsellor of Justice in the King’s Court. The day following it went better; although it is pretty sure that a horse-thief went free from further reproof, because the counsellor was busy rolling that stone up the mountain: Where shall I seek her, if she does not write again? Will she write again? If she would do that, why did she not write a little more at first?

A couple of weeks after the receipt of the letter, one evening about seven o’clock, the counsellor sat at home, not as before by his writing-table busy with acts, but on a corner of the sofa, with drooping arms, deeply absorbed in a mixture of anxious doubts and dreaming expectations. Hope built air-castles, and doubt then puffed them over like card-houses. One of his fancies was, that she summoned him—he would not even in thought use the expression: gave him an interview—at a masquerade. It was consequently no common masquerade, but a grand, elegant masked ball, to which a true lady could repair. The clock was at eleven, the appointed hour: he waited

anxiously the pressing five minutes; then she came and extended him the fine hand in the finest straw-colored glove —

“Letter to the Counsellor of Justice,” said Jens, with strong Funen accent, and short, soldierly pronunciation.

It is so uncommon that what one longs for comes just at the moment of most earnest desire, but notwithstanding the letter was from her: the Counsellor of Justice knew the superscription, would have known it among a hundred thousand. The letter read thus: —

“I ought to be open towards you; and, as we shall never meet, I can be so.”

Here the Counsellor of Justice stopped a moment and caught for breath. A good many of our twenty-year-old beaux, who have never been admitted to the bar, far less have been Court Counsellors, would under similar circumstances have said to themselves: “She writes that she will be open; that is to say, now she will fool me: we will never meet; that is to say, now I shall soon see her.” But Counsellor Bagger believed every word as gospel, and his knees trembled. He read further: —

“I am ashamed of the few words I last wrote you; but my apology is, that it is only two days since I learned that you are married. I have been mistaken, but more in what may be imputed to me than in what I have thought. My only comfort is, that I shall never be known by you or anybody, and that I shall be forgotten, as I shall forget.”

“Never! But who can have spread the infamous slander! What dreadful treachery of some wretch or gossiping wench, who knows nothing about me! And how can she believe it! How in such a town as Copenhagen can

it be a matter of doubt for five minutes, if a Superior Court Counsellor is married or not! Or maybe there is some other Counsellor Bagger married, — a Chamber Counsellor or the like? Or maybe she lives at a distance, in a quiet world, so that the truth of it does not easily reach her? So there is no sunshine more!

“If she should sometime meet me, and know that I was, am, and have been unmarried, and that meanwhile we have both become old and gray, — can one think of any thing more sad? It is enough to make the heart cease beating! But suppose, too, that to-morrow she finds out that she has been deceived: she has once written, ‘I was mistaken,’ and cannot, as a true woman, write it again, unless she first heard from me, and learned how I longed — and so I am cut off from her, as if I lived in the moon. More, more! for I can meet her upon the street and touch her arm without surmising it. It is insupportable! Our time has mail, steamboats, railroads, telegraphs: to me these do not exist; for of what use are they altogether, when one knows not where to search.”

A thought came suddenly, like a meteor in the dark: advertise. What family in Copenhagen did not the “Address Paper” reach? He would put in an advertisement, — but how? “Fritz Bagger is not married.” — No: that was too plain. — “F. B. is not married.” — No: that was not plain enough. As he could find no successful use for his own name, it flashed into his mind to use hers, — geb —; and although it was painful to him to publish this, to him, almost sacred syllable for profane eyes to gaze upon, yet it comforted him, that only one, she herself, would understand it. Yet he hesitated. But one cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs; and although the heart’s finest fibres ache at the thought of sending a message to a fairy through the “Address

Paper," yet one yields to this rather than lose the fairy.

At last, after numerous efforts he stopped at this: "—Geb—! It is a mistake: he waits only for — geb—." It appeared to him to contain the approach to a happy result, and tired out by emotion he fell asleep on his sofa.

Some days after came a new letter with the dear handwriting: its contents were:—

"Well! appear eight days from to-day at Mrs. Canuteson's to congratulate her upon her birthday."

This was sunshine after thunder; this was hope's rainbow which arched itself up to heaven from the earth, yet wet with tears.

"And so she belongs to good society," said the Counsellor of Justice, without noticing how by these words he discovered to himself that a doubt or suspicion had lain until now behind his ecstasy. "But," he added, "consequently it is my own friends who have spread the rumor of my marriage. Friends indeed! A wife is a man's only friend. It is hard, suicidal, to remain a bachelor."

On the appointed day he went too early. Mrs. Canuteson was yet alone. She was surprised at his congratulatory visit; but, however, as it was a courtesy, the surprise was mingled with delight, and Bagger was not the man whose visit a lady would not receive with pleasure. With that ingenuity of wit one can sometimes have, just when the heart is full and taken possession of, he did wonders, and entertained the lady in so lively a manner that she did not perceive how long a time he was passing with her. As the door at length opened, the lady exclaimed:—

"Oh, that is charming! Heartily welcome! Thank

you for last time,* and for all the good in your house ! How does your mother do ? — This amiable young lady's acquaintance I made last summer when we were in the country, and at last she is so good as to keep her promise and visit me. Counsellor Bagger — Miss Hjelm."

The Counsellor wasn't sure that it was She, but he was convinced that it ought to be. Not to speak of Ingeborg Hjelm's being really amiable and *distinguée*, his heart was now prepared, as a photographer's glass which has received collodium, and took the first girl picture that met it. He was quite afraid that there would come more to choose among. Yet the fairy brightness of the unknown had at this moment lost itself for him ; for, however brilliant it may appear to the fancy, it cannot be compared with the warm, beautiful reality, particularly so long as this itself is new and unknown.

He approached and spoke to Miss Hjelm with painful hidden emotion of soul. She was friendly and open, for the name Counsellor Bagger did not occur to her ; and the idea she had formed of him did not at all compare with the young, elegant, handsome man she was now speaking with. True enough, his manner was somewhat peculiarly gallant, which a lady cannot easily mistake ; but this gallantry was united with such an unmistakable respect, or more properly awe, that he gave her the impression of a poetical, knightly nature.

By and by there came more ladies, both married and unmarried, but Bagger had almost forgotten what errand they could have with him. At last Miss Brandt came

* In Sweden and Norway when the guest meets the host or hostess for the first time after an entertainment, the first greeting on the part of the former is always, "Thank you for the last time."

also, accompanied by her sister. As she opened the door, and saw Bagger by the side of Miss Hjelm, she gave a little, a very little, cry, or, more properly, gasped aloud for breath, and made a movement, as if something kept her back.

“ Oh ! my dress caught,” she said, arranged it a little, and then approached Mrs. Canuteson, with smiling face, to offer her congratulation.

Bagger looked at the watch : he had been there two hours ! After yet lingering to exchange a few polite words with Miss Brandt, he took leave. His visit had in all respects been so unusual, and had given occasion for so much comment, that it required more time than could be given there ; and his name was not at all mentioned after he left.





V.

NOW it is certainly true, that whenever Counsellor Bagger was seen for quite a time, he was mostly dreaming and suffering; and people who have not themselves experienced something similar, or have not a fancy for putting themselves in his place, will say, perhaps, that they could have managed themselves better. But, at all events, it cannot be said, that from this time forward he was unpractical; for within eight days from Mrs. Canuteson's birthday he had not only learned where Miss Hjelm lived, but had established himself in a tavern close by the farm, and obtained admittance to the house, which last was not so difficult, since Mrs. Hjelm was a friendly, hospitable lady, and since neither her daughter nor niece thought they ought to prejudice her against him.

In this manner four or five days passed away, which, to judge from Bagger's appearance, were to him very pleasant. He wrote to his colleagues in the Superior Court, that one could only value an autumn in Nature's lap after so laborious and health-destroying work as his life for many years had been. Then one day he received a letter from the unknown, reading thus: —

"Be more successful than last time, at Mrs. Emmy Lund's on Tuesday, two o'clock. Please notice, two o'clock precisely."

"Does she mean so? Is she really coquettish? Yet I think I have been successful so far," said Bagger to

himself, and waited for the Tuesday with comparative ease; in truth he did not at all understand why he should be troubled to go to town.

As early on Tuesday forenoon as proper, he went over to the farm, and was somewhat surprised that there was to be seen no preparation for a town journey. Ingeborg, in her usual morning dress, was seated at the sewing-table. He waited until towards twelve o'clock, calculating that two hours was the least she needed in which to dress and drive to town. The long hand threatened to touch the short hand at the number twelve, without any appearance of Ingeborg's noticing it. She only now and then cast a stealthy look at him, for it had not escaped her, nor the others, that he was in expectancy and excitement. When the clock struck twelve,—he was just alone with her,—he asked suddenly, in a quick trembling voice:—

“Miss Hjelm, you know I am Superior Court Counsellor?”

“No: that I did not know,” she said almost with dread, and arose. “No: that I have never known!”

“But allow me, dear lady, so you know it now,” he said, surprised that the title or profession produced so strong an effect.

“Yes, now I know it,” she said, and held her hand upon her heart. “Why do you tell me that? What does that signify?”

“Nothing else, Miss Hjelm, than that you may understand that I don't believe in witchcraft.”

A speaker's physiognomy is often more intelligible than his words; and as Miss Hjelm saw the both hearty and spirited or jovial expression in the counsellor's face, she had not that inclination, which she under other circumstances would have had, quickly to break off the

conversation and go away. It is possible, also, that his situation as Superior Court Counsellor — as that counsellor mentioned by Miss Brandt — did not, after a moment's consideration, appear to her so dreadful as at the first moment of surprise. So she answered, —

“But, Mr. Counsellor, is there then anybody who has accused you of believing in witchcraft?”

“No, dear madam; but for all that I can assure you, that at the moment the clock struck twelve I thought that you, by two o'clock, must fly away in the form of a bird.”

“As the clock struck twelve now, at noon? — not at midnight?”

“No, just a little since.”

“That is remarkable. Can you satisfy my curiosity, and tell me why?”

“Because under ordinary circumstances it appears to me impossible for a lady to make her toilette and drive ten miles in less than two hours.”

“That is quite true, Mr. Counsellor; but neither do I intend to drive ten miles to-day.”

“It was for that reason that I said, fly.”

“Neither fly. And to convince you and quite certainly rid you of the idea of witchcraft, you can stay here, if you please, until — what time was it?”

“Two o'clock.”

“That is two long hours; but the Counsellor can, if he please, lay that offering upon the altar of education.”

“Oh! I know another altar, upon which I would rather offer the two only all too short hours” —

“Let it now be upon that of education. You promised my cousin and me that you would read to us about popular science of nature and interesting facts in the life of animals.”

"Yes, dear madam; but *I* cannot fly: my carriage stands waiting at the tavern."

"Oh, I beg pardon! an agreeable journey, Mr. Counsellor."

"Yes; but I don't understand why I shall drive the ten miles."

"Every one knows his own concerns best."

"Oh, yes! that is true. But I at least don't know mine."

Miss Hjelm made no answer to this, and there was a little pause.

"I would," continued the counsellor, somewhat puzzled, "take the great liberty to propose that you should ride with me."

"I have already told the Counsellor that I did not intend to go to town to-day," answered Miss Hjelm, coldly.

"Yes," continued Bagger, following his own ideas, "and so I thought, also, that we could as well stay here."

At this moment Bagger was so earnest and impassioned, that Ingeborg, in hearing words so very wide of what she regarded as reasonable, began to suspect his mind of being a little disordered, and with an inquiring anxiousness looked at him.

Meeting the look from these eyes, Bagger could no longer continue the inquisition which he had carried on for the sake of involving Miss Hjelm in self-contradiction and bringing her to confession. He himself came to confession, and exclaimed, —

"Miss Ingeborg, I ask you for Heaven's sake have pity on me, and tell me if you expect me at two o'clock to-day at Mrs. Lund's!"

"I expect you at Mrs. Lund's!" exclaimed Miss Hjelm.

"Is it not you, then, who have written me that" —

"I have never written to you!" cried Ingeborg, and almost tore away the hand which Bagger tried to hold.

"For God's sake, don't go, Miss——! My dear madam, you must forgive me: you shall know all!"

And now he began to tell his tale, not according to rules of rhetoric and logic, but on the contrary in a way which certainly showed how little even our abler lawyers are educated to extemporize.

But, however, there was in his words a certain almost wild eloquence; and, beside, Miss Hjelm had some foreknowledge, that helped her to understand and fill up what was wanting under the counsellor's restless eloquence. At last he came to the point; while his words were of whirlwind and letters, his tone and eye spoke unconsciously to him a true, honest, though fanciful language of passion; and however comical a disinterested spectator might have found it, it sounded very earnest to her who was the object and sympathetic listener.

"Yes; but what then?" at last asked Ingeborg, with a soft smile and not withdrawing the hand that Bagger had seized. "The proper meaning of what you have told me is that your troth is plighted to another, unknown lady."

"No: that isn't the proper meaning" —

"But yet it is a fact. At the moment when you stand at the altar with one, another can step forward and claim you."

"Oh, that kind of a claim! A piece of paper without signature, sent away in the air! In law it has no validity at all, and morally it has no power, when I love another as I love you, Ingeborg!"

"That I am not sure of. It appears to me there is something painful in not being faithful to one's youth and its promises, and in the consciousness of having deceived another."

“You say this so earnestly, Ingeborg, that you make me desperate. I confess that there is something . . . something I would wish otherwise . . . but for Heaven’s sake, make it not so earnest!”

As Ingeborg knew so well about it, she could not regard the matter as earnestly as her words denoted; but for another reason she had suddenly conceived or felt an earnestness. It would not do to have a husband with so much fancy as Bagger, always having something unknown, fairy-like, lying out upon the horizon, holding claim upon him from his youth; and on the other hand it was against her principles, notwithstanding her confidence in his silence, to convey to him the knowledge that it was Miss Brandt who played fairy.

She said to him, “You must have your letter, your obligation, your marriage promise back.”

“Yes,” he answered with a sigh of discouragement: “it is true enough I ought; but where shall I turn? That is just the immeasurable difficulty.”

“Write by the same mail as before.”

“Which?”

“Let the whirlwind, that brought the first letter to its destination, also take care of this, in which you demand your word back.”

“Oh, that you do not mean! Or if you mean it, then I may honestly confess that I am not young any more or have not received another youth. I have not courage to write any thing, for fear it should come to others than to you.”

“So I see that, after all, I may act as witch to-day. Write, and I will take care of the letter: do you hesitate?”

“No: only it took me a moment to comprehend the promise, involved in this that you will take care of

my letter. I obey you blindly; but what shall I write?"

"Write: 'Dear fairy,—Since I woo Miss Hjelm's hand and heart,'"—

"Oh, you acknowledge it! O Ingeborg, the Lord's blessing upon you!" said Bagger, and would rise.

"'I ask you to send me my billet back.'—Have you that?"

"Yes, Ingeborg, my Ingeborg, my unspeakably loved Ingeborg! How poor language is, when the heart is so full!"

"Now name, date, and address. Have you that?—'Postscriptum. I give you my word of honor, that I neither know who you are, or how this letter shall reach you.'—Have you that?"

"That I can truly give. I am as blind as" . . .

"Let me add the witch-formulæ."

"O Ingeborg, you will write upon the same paper with me, in a letter where I have written your name!"

"Hand me the pen. We must have the letter sent to the mail before two o'clock."

"Two o'clock. How queer! The last letter reads: 'Take notice of the striking two.'"

"That we will," said Ingeborg.

She wrote: "Dear Miss Brandt, I, too, ask you to send the Counsellor his billet, and I pray you to write upon it: 'Given me by Miss Hjelm.' It is best for all parties that the fun does not come out in gossip. You shall by return of mail receive back your letters."





VI.

IT is allowed to charitable minds to remain in doubt about what had really been Miss Brandt's design. Perhaps she only wished to make roguish psychological experiments, to convince herself to how many forenoon congratulatory visits a Counsellor of Justice of the Superior Court could be brought to appear. The emotion she almost exposed, when at Mrs. Canuteson's she saw Bagger by Miss Hjelm's side, may have been pure surprise at the working of the affair. Every one of the rest of us who have been conversant with the whirlwind, the letter, and Ingeborg's relinquishment of the same, would also have been surprised at seeing her and the letter-writer brought together notwithstanding, and would not, perhaps, been able with as much ease and success to hide our surprise. The letter to Bagger, in which Miss Brandt contrary to her better knowledge, spoke of him as married, may have been a sincere attempt to end the whole in a way which repentance and anxiety quickly seized upon to put an insurmountable hindrance before herself; but it may surely enough have had also the aim to see how far Bagger had gone and how much spirit and fancy he had to carry the intrigue out. The more one thinks upon it, the less one feels able to give either of the two interpretations absolute preference. Yet one will have remarked, that Ingeborg herself in her little note mentioned the matter as "fun." On the other side, if it was earnestness, if she had felt "somewhat" for Counsellor Bagger, then let us

take comfort in the fact that Miss Brandt was a well cultivated girl, and that her intellect held dominion over her heart. She could with one eye see that the campaign had ended, and further, that she, by receiving peace pure and simple, had certainly not gained any conquest, but obtained the *status quo ante bellum*, which often between antagonists has been considered so respectable, that both parties officially have sung *Te Deum*, although surely only one could sing it from the heart. Now it is and may remain undecided what the real state of the case was : from either point of view there was a plain and even line drawn for her, and she followed it. Next day the letter came in an envelope directed to the counsellor.

As Bagger in the presence of Ingeborg opened the letter and again saw the long-lost epistle of his early days, he trembled like a man before whom the spirit-world apparently passes. But as he perceived the added words, he exclaimed in utter perplexity : “ Am I awake? Do I dream? How is this possible?”

“ Why should it not be possible?” asked Ingeborg. “ To whom else should the letter originally have come, than to — geb —?”

“ — Geb —? — Geb —? Yes, who is — geb —?” asked Bagger with bewildered look.

“ Who other than Ingeborg? is it not the third, fourth, and fifth letters of my name?”

“ Oh!” exclaimed Bagger, pressing his hand upon his forehead, and, as he at the next moment seized Ingeborg’s hand, added with an eye which had become dim with joy, “ Truly, I have had more fortune than sense.”

Ingeborg answered, smiling : —

“ That ought he to expect who intrusts his fate to the wind’s flying mail.”



OLD OLAF.

FROM THE NORWEGIAN OF MAGDALENE THORESEN.





OLD OLAF.

A CALM, cloudless autumn day rested upon the whole Vosse slope, at the foot of which a great deep lake lay smiling, the glittering sunbeams refracted upon its surface as upon a plain of polished steel. On this side the slope, the shore lay like greensward pillows amid the playing surf; while opposite, a dark, bold mountain-range towered like a threatening border-sentinel, exhibiting in the clouds its forms, — not fantastic, but even and straightforward, as if conscious of its power; its dark crest being painted alike vividly on the light-blue ground of heaven, and in the dim water. Here were two grand aspects, — eternity above and below. Awhile the picture remained in undisturbed quiet. There are moments in nature when it seems as if even breath were suspended, while all things pause to listen for the coming moment; silent intervals between the strains, which immediately afterward burst forth with fuller strength to swell the chorus.

There was a space on a little descent toward the water, where stood a gigantic tree; not so very tall, but broad and compact, covered with bright-red berries. Close to its base a man lay in deep sleep, his head resting upon a small red trunk, his knees drawn upward, and arms

stretched outward. In the top of the tree a flock of magpies had alighted, swaying slightly the boughs as they skipped from one to another, sharpening the beak, nipping a full ripe berry, or turning the head now and then to look archly down at the sleeper. Suddenly the man drew his right hand over his face (driving a hungry mosquito from its first bite, although he had satisfied hundreds before), and turned his head upon its side. But at the same moment the trunk slipped out and tumbled down the descent. The whole flock rose noisily from the tree and flew frightened away. The man, rising quickly, gazed around the landscape with sleepy eye, as if to ascertain his whereabouts. Now his gaze fell upon the trunk, which had not stopped in its fall until it reached the water, and there lay swaying proudly with the waves like a buoy. Instantly this cleared his vision: he slipped quickly down, ran out into the water, and after a couple of efforts laid hold of the box.

Soon after he sat down again under the tree, wiping his treasure, first with a small, spotted handkerchief, afterward with the palm of his hand, carefully, tenderly, like a mother handling an infant. Then he opened it, and, peeping in, took out a folded bosom, then a small package of printed scraps, wiping them carefully and laying them beside him in the sunshine; then lifted here and there the other contents, and at last put all back again, and shut the trunk. But this was all done in that queer, guarded manner with which we protect an only secret. The man of prosperity, who spreads his treasures over a hundred places, knows nothing of the joy which a single little hiding-place can give to him who has only a poor trifle to take care of.

But the moment which seemed a pause in nature disappeared, and now followed noise upon noise in unceasing hurry.

Down from the mountain came the bellowing of a cow ; flocks of birds flew eagerly from tree to tree, contending for the highest seat at the spread board, and all the while snatching the red berries from each other's beaks. Far back, where the church stood on a little eminence, with the small houses of the village in front, there arose a hum of mixed sounds, in which each seemed striving for ascendancy ; and from the nearest farm a boat was launched, containing three men, who urged it swiftly as an arrow over the quiet water-plain, leaving the deep furrow of the keel behind.

Now the man, trunk in hand, arose and looked toward the village, which appeared to be the central point of active life. There was a nervous winking about his eyes, and a restlessness in his whole manner : it seemed as if he were half inclined to go forward, half backward. His face was weather-beaten, with large features, the forehead and cheeks bearing deep furrows, but not as if made by the even pace of time ; for a look of youthfulness was still there : it seemed rather as if time had now and then paused in wrath and stamped its impress, so that carelessness might not again the next moment sweep it away. In his stature nature seemed to have given him a considerable size, which a hard life had gradually diminished. His head was large and strongly formed, with a disorderly covering of light-brown hair ; but his neck was crooked, and looked as if the spinal column had been forcibly taken away. His back was broad, but one shoulder much lower than the other ; and the right leg was bent at the knee-joint.

It was but a short time that he stood there hesitating about the next step, but still long enough to give a picture of one who had never yet found himself at home ; and who, every time conscience knocked and demanded

a little conversation concerning its account against him, became so busily occupied with a hundred little matters outside, that this claimant had necessarily to be deferred. But procrastination is the thief of time, says the proverb.

At last he collected himself, and directed his course toward the village, walking with difficulty ; for with every step his body bent toward the earth, and his breathing was short and heavy. However, he proceeded quickly ; and, notwithstanding his infirmity, there was in his form a singular consistency which is sometimes found in nature after violent convulsion, where what has been separated has eventually joined itself to the mass with peculiar grace and harmony.

In the village from which the loud murmur of voices proceeded, a numerous crowd was gathered ; for the autumn horse-show was now going on.

A few booths and tables for refreshment were scattered over the market-ground. Here was collected a moving crowd of buyers and sellers, seeking or avoiding one another, as offers of trade tempted or repelled ; but always gathering, as of one mind, when the glass was filled.

There was a wild confusion of strife and of frolic, of horse-neighing, whip-cracking, and swearing, amid which the operations of trade were prominent, but not in a favorable aspect. And yet the day's brightness rested upon this crowd, chasing away the fumes of strong drink ; and there was a certain regard to decency, although excitement now and then contracted the muscles in the broad forehead of the Vosse-man, and, like presages of an approaching storm, little flashes of lightning might be detected in his intelligent eye. His hands were still buried in his pockets, but the violent clench was not thus concealed ; and the sudden shrugging of his shoulders and backward toss of his head showed the uprising of a

wild, unsubdued nature, in opposition to either good or evil.

“Hallo, Old Olaf!” shouted a youth, giving the lean old horse he rode a crack of his whip, and aiming toward the limping individual carrying the red box, who just appeared around the corner of a house close to the market-ground.

The man changed his trunk to the other hand, and limped on, making no reply to the speaker.

“Come here and make an offer, Old Olaf!” sounded from another direction.

“Ain’t you a witness, Old Olaf! that I bought my horse last fall and gave thirty-five dollars for it, and my pipe to boot?” shouted a third, holding a small, worn-out horse by the bridle, while a purchaser examined its mouth, and gave its feet a crack of the whip to enliven it. But the poor, discouraged animal didn’t stir; and if it had been stung by a wasp, the effect would have been the same.

“I know nothing about it,” muttered the man, evasively, turning another way.

“Look out, Old Olaf! or I’ll let my horse make a leap over you,” shouted a bold youth, who sat upon a glossy brown, lively animal, letting it turn rapidly in every direction, while he pressed his heels into its sides, so that it reared and shied with rage, and pawed, making the stones and dirt fly about over table and benches.

Old Olaf did not wait for a second warning, but frightened turned away, and amid scoffs and jerks pushed at last through the crowd to the main road, leading behind the numerous small houses of the parsonage along the water to a fir grove.

Soon he had passed the main road, and the green hedge of the wood-path enclosed him. Now he slackened his pace, and, looking back, wiped the perspiration from his

forehead. But at this moment a company on horseback, laughing and shouting, approached on the same road; and, like a chased deer, he rushed forward again through the shady path, panting from the intolerable exertion, and bending yet more, his alternate steps appearing like a rise and a fall.

Not until he had reached a little eminence on the mountain, which rose in uneven gradations behind the wood, where the noise of the market-place only came as a subdued echo, did Old Olaf feel safe. And here he seated himself upon a rock, took the trunk in his lap, and embraced it with fervency, as if it had been a living soul which he had rescued from death and destruction.

In this manner he sat for some time, with closed eyes, and a melancholy expression about his mouth. But it was not from fatigue he bowed, it was not rest he took; this was evident at the first glance: he was rather looking back over the current of time, upon a picture of the happiness of other days.

Now he seemed to catch an idea and concentrate his thoughts upon it. Opening his trunk, he took piece after piece from it as before, only with a little more hurry, until he reached the bottom. There lay a little folded piece of yellow paper, with large, awkward characters upon it: this he unfolded upon his knee, smoothing it with his hand to make it lie open, and then began to sing the written words, slowly and mournfully, like a solemn dirge, and yet they were not in the least adapted to the tune.

But now, as the noise of the distant multitude rose and fell with varying sounds, like those of billows dashing against the rock, and while Old Olaf sung and drew the back of his hand across his eyes, there stood on an upper eminence, leaning against the wall of a mountain hut, a

small, light-haired girl, and at a short distance from her a youth.

She seemed to evade him, looking in the direction of the mountains on the opposite side, while he looked downward toward the village. They both stood as if struck dumb by a word, such a one as may either unite or separate for life.

The hut door opened, and an old woman stepped out with arms full of milk-pans, which she set to dry against the wall.

This action startled the girl, who stepped forward to move away; but at the same time the youth advanced toward her; — she looking downward, he looking upon her. Her face was scarlet, but its whole expression depressed; her eyelids were half closed, her lips tightly compressed, as if sealing up a strong but sad resolution.

His countenance, on the contrary, was dark and hard; his large features were handsome, but looked as if stiffened with spite. In his eye was an unquiet gleam, which now flashed with love, now with hate.

At last he broke the suspense, exclaiming, as he advanced toward her, —

“You will have to retract.”

She sorrowfully shook her head in reply.

“Do you think any other can love you as I do?” he asked.

“I have not thought of any other,” she whispered.

“In that you do well, girl; for if I should hear of such a one, I should show him a quick way out of life!”

“O Jesus!” she sobbed, turning frightened away.

“Don’t be afraid, Sigrid,” he exclaimed softly and fervently, throwing his arm around her, drawing her toward the precipice. “You are like food and sunshine to me! I take no pleasure in any thing when you are not with

me. . . . I curse the sun, and I swallow my food, and there follows no blessing. And you! the prettiest girl in the whole crowd! Should you not have the prettiest fellow?—Yes: I think you ought! Thore Sten is the man for Sigrid Bergslien. What are the rest worth? Nothing, all together! I understand a little of every thing, you see: no one can stand before me; where I put my fist, I leave my mark.”

“Oh! don’t come near me with your awful wildness,” interrupted the girl, withdrawing from him.

“Nonsense, girl!” he shouted angrily, pulling her to himself again. “Is it worth being offended at? Everybody can’t be such a model! I will sometime be steady too: you can lead me as you will, Sigrid! I forget every thing when I look at you, for you are as beautiful as a flower in the sunlight. And now our marriage can take place at once, as soon as possible: do you hear, girl!”

“Oh, no, Thore! oh, no!” she replied, in a frightened whisper.

“Oh, yes, Sigrid, certainly it can! I long for you so that I am almost crazy. When I am with you, I have no rest, for I know I must leave you again; and when I am away, I brave every thing to get to you again. What does this mean?”

“I don’t understand you, Thore: we must part for this life.”

“Take me as I am, girl: you can reform me better than anybody else.”

“O Heaven!” she sobbed submissively, and burst into weeping.

“You have no love for me any more, perhaps?” he asked impatiently.

“Yes, I have,” she replied: “my love isn’t changeable like your resolutions.”

“Well, then we will be united for life!” he exclaimed vehemently, seizing both her hands. “I shall remain all day with you. Let old Kari manage up here, and we’ll go down to Bergslien: I’ll have it arranged all right. If you love me as I do you, our marriage shall take place in a month.”

“Oh, no, Thore! I can’t do this, indeed I can’t: don’t be angry at me!” she pleaded, weeping and trembling.

“The devil!” he exclaimed, in overflowing wrath, and threw her from him with such violence that she fell over the ledge.

There came a shout from the hut, and he heard a woman’s voice calling his name; but he heeded nothing. Fugitive-like he fled down the mountain, leaping from ledge to ledge, sliding great distances where the slope was even, until in his speed he reached Old Olaf, who had finished his song, and, after carefully replacing it in the box, had set this down by his side, and was trying again to make his weak limbs support him.

“Take your rubbish out of the way!” shouted the boy, kicking the box so that it followed him tumbling from rock to rock until it stopped at the foot of the mountain.

“That was Thore Sten!” exclaimed Old Olaf immediately afterward, losing all self control, and endeavoring, as it were, to make the fact clear and fasten it in his memory. Then he patiently let himself down, alternately sliding and limping until he reached the trunk, when, with this in hand, he toiled upward again the same difficult way he had gone two hours before. But now he paused not in his ascent until he reached the first high plain, where, on one hand, a fruitful mountain valley stretched out, while on the other the mountain toward the sea rose in even terraces to its summit.

Far back, where the valley was bounded by a wild peak, lay the rich peasant farm, Bergslien, with an extensive pasture on one side, and well-cultivated fields on the other. A couple of cottages lay at some distance from the farm-house, and, still further this way, a solitary hut.

A little opening in the roof, enclosed by a weak framework of brick, signified a chimney; and a small window in front, the broken glass of which was here and there patched with paper, or filled with an old rag, spoke of life within. It might still be the abode of human beings, however poor its appearance; and so it was, the home of an old maiden, who was commonly called Kari, but occasionally more particularly distinguished as Knapstad Kari. She had neither land nor stock of which to take the care or profit; and when she busied herself with them, as she did almost every day while summer lasted, it was the property of others: and in this way she maintained herself the while. But when winter iced and darkened all without and within, she spun, knitted a little, and where there was a suffering neighbor or a sick animal, nursed and cared for them according to their need. In this way she had lived forty winters in the miserable house, "the raven's nest," as she herself called it good humoredly.

But as it stood there this afternoon, between heathy hillocks and light-green juniper-bushes, with the sunshine playing upon its small window-panes, it looked singularly inviting, as when poverty presents its smiles and welcomes, although it has naught else to offer.

It was solitary and quiet on the mountain plain; only the distant barking of a dog, mingled with the sound of human voices, was faintly heard. Now a limping figure lifted itself little by little upward, along the steep path leading from the village: it was Old Olaf. He paused

a few moments to collect breath after the difficult ascent, then took his way directly over toward Knapstad Kari's house.

But, as he neared it, he slackened his steps, sighed heavily, and finally made a long stop on the road, for the sake, it appeared, of breathing more easily, or perhaps to throw off some of the burden from his heart; for he sighed deeply and repeatedly, and then proceeded, but not far before he stopped again.

It seemed almost as if the little house gilded by the setting sun, and standing in relief against the emerald-green juniper-ground, both tempted and awed him with its sacredness.

At last he limped a little nearer, spying around; then listened at the door, and his countenance evinced, when about venturing to knock, his fear that nobody was at home;—but he must try. He opened the door and peeped in, but instantly shut it again, for no one was there.

Now disappointment and loneliness overwhelmed him with such force, that he sank under it, and burst into weeping like a little child; and a child he was too, in the highest degree, although he was fast approaching that period of time when dust is given unto dust. Notwithstanding what the law says, maturity does not come with years: it is the will which gives it; and Old Olaf was not mature in any respect.

Restless and adventurous, he roved from parish to parish, making himself a home wherever he came. He was a kind of wandering missionary; singing for the family with whom he lodged a song or a hymn, interspersing his melodies with reading accounts of the victory of the gospel over heathen opposition. He could also tell fearful tales concerning the savage treatment experi-

enced by bearers of the divine message, knowing well how to set it forth in such a manner as to produce the best effect upon his audience ; and this procured him help for a time.

But all this was done with a certain kind of pride. Occasionally, there would be a little blaze of strength in his appearance ; but this was only a puff, through which one discerned the failing fire,—it was easily extinguished.

A triple strain ran through Old Olaf's life, but it was discordant, wild, tuneless, and ending with a sigh ; it spoke of unrestraint, despondency, and inefficiency. A word of recklessness to him, and his nature flashed like a rocket and soared apace ; but afterward repentance and anguish overwhelmed him, and he was ready to sell himself for a farthing, if conscience only went in the bargain, so that he could escape its eternal reproaches. Then followed the third condition, the usual one, in which his mind alternated between indolence and the desire of self-maintenance, but this was without ambition or will : it was a season in which his nature seemed reposing, after one eruption, to gather strength for the next ; for beneath indolence lie hidden the most violent passions.

"Kari is up at Bergslien, I guess," said a little cowboy, who had been watching Olaf in the distance.

Old Olaf seized his trunk with a scrutinizing look at the boy.

"Sigrid has tumbled over the ledge," continued the boy, stepping nearer.

Old Olaf looked toward Bergslien with a sad eye, and made no answer.

"Ain't you the one they call Old Olaf?" asked the boy, spitting.

But Old Olaf took no time to be offended : he was al-

ready on his way to a new goal, and, as before, one moment like one sure of welcome, the next timid, hesitating, as if sure of nothing.

At length he struggled forward to Bergslien. On the grass-plot, in front of the house, stood an old woman busy with some small linen, which she wrung out and hung over a couple of loose logs.

"Good day, Kari!" said Old Olaf, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

The woman looked at him with two bright, prudent eyes, set in an old careworn face, and gave a nod in reply; but it was short and indifferent enough, and neither said go or stay.

"I have been at the house," he added awhile after, seating himself on the logs beside her. There was little courage left in him.

"I shall stay over night here," said Kari, after a little pause, but she did not look at him.

"Oh, yes! to be sure," he sighed submissively to his fate.

"Go there and make yourself comfortable," she added awhile after.

"In the lonely house?" he asked, with melancholy voice.

"I can't be both here and there," she interrupted.

"There is small comfort for me where you are not."

"Then it appears you need but little comfort," she answered a little sneeringly.

"My heart will burst, I need it so much!" he exclaimed, in a little louder tone.

"Hush!" said Kari, authoritatively, glancing toward the house: "don't speak so loud that I cannot hear if they call me, for Sigrid is sick."

"God grant I may lie as she does, then some one will pity me too, and I'll not have to go around so like a leper," sighed Olaf, his voice choked with weeping.

"You can't complain, Olaf; for one who never settles himself firmly upon any thing, carries a disease with him wherever he goes, and the worst disease is discontent," said Kari, seating herself beside him.

"Yes: show me what I can settle upon," he moaned, with increased weeping.

"Trust in our Lord."

"He is so far away!"

"Well, then, it is you who make the distance," she answered firmly.

"You are always so stern, Kari," he sobbed, "one can't come to you with grief."

"But it is a long time since you came with joy; and, after all, it is only once in a while that you find your way up here to the mountain."

"There is such recklessness down there, one gets tired of it."

"It is natural enough that one should grow tired of being in all kinds of company," she replied, in an offended manner.

"I could almost swear there is magic in it," said Olaf. "It first attracts, then repels" —

"I will tell you how that is, Olaf," she interrupted suddenly. "You are just as if there were two men in you: one a youth, attracted by this recklessness; the other, a poor cripple, longing for rest. You must put a barrier between the two; one can't be both old and young at the same time: trifling and earnestness never harmonize."

"Yes: it is your lot to have order in all things; but another poor body's misfortune to have to struggle against evil," sighed Old Olaf, a little comforted.

"We are all tempted by evil," said Kari, emphatically; "but the Lord God has said, 'Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'"

"Perhaps I am too old in evil," he said submissively, but not from his heart.

"There is only one who is too old in the evil, and that is the devil himself, Olaf!"

"Don't be so severe, Kari!"

"One has to be severe with indolence."

"Am I indolent?" asked Old Olaf, crestfallen: "I don't allow myself rest anywhere."

"Yes: this is just the worst kind of indolence," she continued; "for you only run from reflection. Every time our Lord puts his hand upon you, and makes you pause, you are like one possessed . . . Do you remember how you struggled against reflection when you lay here many weeks between life and death, after Lars Stordraget had broken your back? Did your soul take rest then? Did you bear the cross, Olaf? No: you threw it away and seized it again, as your disease grew better or worse . . . And, afterward, when your knee began to fester after the stab you got at Bolstad eight years ago, was it any better with you then? No: no better!" . . .

"Alas! had you stood by me, Kari!" he said, with a sigh more from his heart.

"On what day or hour have I ever let go my hold of you?" she asked sternly.

Old Olaf crept closer to the corner without answering, as if unable to make himself diminutive enough in comparison with her strength and sternness; for, however much he objected to them, there was a tell-tale expression in his countenance, witnessing to the truth of her words.

"Yes: in the eye of man it may appear so," she continued awhile after; "but in the sight of God I have never let you go."

"Maybe it isn't too late yet," whispered he, meekly.

"Too late for this life," she sighed, silently weeping.

"Didn't you say yourself, on that day when we broke with each other, that if one only earnestly resolved, he would succeed . . . and now I do so," he exclaimed, drawing himself up.

"Yes: God grant it!" she sighed, wiping her eyes. "But you have two wills, that's the misfortune. It's of little use to hitch two horses to the plough, when one will pull this way and the other that. Either they remain on one spot or break asunder, each running his own way with a part of the wreck."

"Now I have pledged my word, and will stand by it," he said, with a little more boldness, rising to go.

"Will you go to my house?" asked Kari.

"No: to the village again."

"If you meet Thore Sten, keep away from him: he is a passionate boy," said Kari, rising suddenly.

"He came running down the mountain, past where I sat taking a little rest, and gave such a kick to my trunk that it tumbled to the bottom. I think he was crazy," said Olaf.

"He is a boasting rascal, blowing his words about as if no one could answer him."

"But that's a lad who dares venture upon the point of a knife!" exclaimed Olaf, a gleam of wild pleasure flashing from his eye.

"Oh, yes! he begins where you did forty years ago," said Kari, dryly. "You haven't heard what has happened? But, of course not; how could you? You know that Sigrid, the daughter here, was engaged to Thore years ago; for a while all went smoothly enough, but then, afterward, the wrong way. He has begun trading horses, and neither the girl nor her father likes that, for it isn't necessary. Bergslien can feed its man without

that ; and of late, more than once, she has returned him his promise. To-day, as he was up there at the mountain hut, her rejection became very decided, notwithstanding he tempted and coaxed like an evil spirit. But, as she remained firm, in a moment of excitement he gave her a push that sent her over the precipice, and knocked her senseless : hadn't I been at the hut and witnessed it, so that I could run to help her, I don't know what would have been the result."

"To think ! he pushed her," exclaimed Old Olaf, shuddering.

"Oh ! after all, I don't think so much of that : after receiving the first injury, one could surely bear the second."

"Yes ; but her life, Kari."

"One would rather die by such an accident than lose the joy of a whole lifetime," she sighed.

"Don't speak so, Kari !" replied Olaf, mournfully.

"Alas ! there is little joy in life, when one only endures it looking for the end," she added quietly, then turned and went into the house.

"O God, O God !" he cried ; but Kari heeded not, and remained where she was.

She had so many times seen him in such anguish, that she did not care to witness a repetition. His grief was like that of a weeping child, who, at a distance, sees sweetmeats in the comforter's hand.

And this Old Olaf himself knew : he understood perfectly well his own weakness, and knew he was active and vigorous in resolution, fickle and weak in performance, while Kari was slow to resolve and strong to fulfil. But, nevertheless, she was still his sole earthly desire, and had been so for more than forty years. To be sure, he had now and then cast this desire from him, and been seized by it again ; but every time he possessed it anew.

he had an unspeakable dread of its loss. And now he could not go without one more word, although he knew not at all what he wished to say : so he stole away to the house and opened the door, meek and self-abased as a repentant sinner ; but when he stood there, and their eyes met in sorrowful, hopeless communion, he turned and left without a word.

Kari gazed after him as his poor figure passed the window, disappearing behind the house, then quietly seated herself, bent in mournful retrospection ; and her view now was the same she had taken for forty years, — neither faded nor changed by time, but just as when, at the moment of decision, she had shut herself in with it.

Knapstad Kari, so named from her father, a poor laborer named Nils Knapstad, was a light-hearted girl twenty years of age, healthy and beautiful, when she went to service at Gravseid, a farm of considerable size in the neighboring parish. Her master — the mistress was dead long before — was kind and considerate, treating her more as a daughter than a servant ; and her first year was passed in comfort and happiness.

On the farm, Olaf was the youngest of three grown-up sons, well known by all, and a favorite wherever he went ; for, with good abilities, he combined beauty and boldness. When Kari became a member of the family at Gravseid, it was said at once, among the young people, that this was the girl for Olaf, and he the boy suited to her ; for at their first meeting they were just as two birds, hopping and singing each on its branch, happy in every thing, but happiest in each other.

Afterward, when winter came with drifting snow, they abode under the common roof, taking mutual comfort and joy ; for as each smoothed the path of the other, nothing

was in the way of their happiness. And when spring came, and the birds again flew toward the wood, they, too, met on a green branch, each with straw in beak for the future nest.

Now, Olaf's father did not immediately give a joyful assent to this engagement ; but Kari was a noble girl, industrious and clever, consequently the old man's dissatisfaction soon disappeared, and sincere pleasure took its place.

After the lapse of a year the father died. The eldest son took possession of the farm, and the two younger had to look out for other places in life ; meanwhile Kari continued at Gravseid.

Now, Olaf began to trade : first in wool, fur, and other articles of domestic use ; but, as this brought no profit or any consequence, afterward in horses. He exchanged and sold, venturing boldly where others hesitated, never allowing himself to be discouraged at a loss. Only one winter should pass ere the consummation of the young couple's happiness, for Olaf earned much money : he had already bought a small house in the village, and their marriage was to take place in the spring.

Meanwhile, Olaf did not gain all this shrewdness and success in trade without sacrifice : no one perceived this more clearly than Kari. He came no longer daily to Gravseid, and, when there, had something in his deportment better adapted to the treatment of an unmanageable horse, which was to be subdued, than to a young girl, delicate of thought and soul, who received a caress from him as it were a gift from heaven.

And this grew upon him. Cause can be added to cause an hundred-fold before the consequence is ripe. The many journeys Olaf had necessarily to make hardened both soul and body ; for the winter was severe and

unyielding, evil must be brought to contend with evil, and hardness with hardness, to attain success. So Olaf drank with others, first to cheer and strengthen himself, afterward as a pastime, and finally to intoxication. He became so in the habit of affirming a lie, that the truth became as a lie to him, and a lie truth; but now his steadfastness was gone, and wherever he set his foot there he slipped.

Yet still, around in the parish, it was said, —

“Olaf Gravseid! bold fellow he! Measure knife-points with him?—as well challenge death!”

Spring came, but brought no marriage-feast at Gravseid this time. Kari had not wept herself weak, yet Olaf's sin and wickedness had caused her many bitter tears. A moment came, however, when she gave vent to her feelings; for, though she herself had trembled at the thought, she had quietly concealed her resolution until it was tried and strong; and this put the firmly rooted barrier between them, which no argument, no tears, no pleading, could demolish or shake.

“She would not have a hand in setting an enclosure around the weeds of his planting in life. She would not make a bed for sin, and read the Lord's prayer over falsehood!”

Now the bad spirit of Olaf sunk, — but not like darkness in the sea, the bright rosy morning dawning above it, in strong pain-born resolutions. No: he wept first, then drank, and finally quarrelled with all, by which he gained the general ill-will; and at last, with injured limbs and weakened spirit, he wandered from parish to parish, sustaining life by a small trade in religious tracts and the like. Now people took the proud name “Olaf Gravseid” away, christening him “Old Olaf,” by which name he was universally known, but not respected.

In the mean time Kari went her own way, and it was a solitary one; but this she liked. To be sure one and another sought her; for, although sorrow and disappointment had plucked the beautiful roses from her cheeks, the clear light remained in her eye, and the glossy golden hue upon her hair: but Kari went so firmly and unimpressibly past all, that at last she spread that desert around her which a quiet uncommunicative sorrow always creates.

The years rolled away. Kari lived at last as an old maiden, in the little house on Bergsli-farm, where, once in a while, Olaf came to be healed of the wounds caused by his bad temper and recklessness; and yet Kari well knew that her nursing only gave him strength to encounter new danger.

When he was thus comforted and healed, and had regained sufficient courage to long anew for the scenes beyond the mountain, Kari sat alone there, a little poorer than before in earthly goods, and also a little poorer in heart; for it was now her only desire, her old heart's golden dream, in her secret thoughts, to hold fast to "her betrothed, Olaf Gravseid, the bold, faultless lad!" And this was so pleasant to her! for better things must come yet. So, light-hearted, she commenced her work; and this youthful thought more than half carried her through. And when the week was ended, and the Sabbath came with holy song and rest, the sacred work of afternoon was taken out, a yellow piece of linen, containing much ornamental sewing, — it was Olaf's bridal shirt.

And then came needle and thread upon the table. The thimble was put upon the finger, the spectacles upon the nose, and, humming, she began the difficult stitching, — somewhat more difficult now than in her younger days, when her sight was a clear guide to her steady hand.

And when the snow drifted around the house, forcing its way through the rickety window-frame, she heeded not: it melted immediately, for in the fireplace the fir and juniper boughs blazed and crackled like a wonderful firework of small stars and glittering sheaves scattered around; and the little room was both fragrant and warm. Yes: even when it seemed as if the storm, with its powerful arms, would lift the old house from the ground and dance with it, in its mighty hand, out down the mountain side, — still she heeded not! This sport it had threatened so often, that it no longer terrified her: nay, it was even pleasant, and sounded as if many men's voices mingled in the roar. . . . “Yes: even Olaf's too; for, when that boy shouted, he was heard above the greatest din!”

But then when Old Olaf came again, limping up the mountain toward the house, timid and suffering, like one shipwrecked, a sudden pain ran through her whole body; for at that moment the shining web burst, and she stood face to face with the sorrowful reality. So, sighing, she folded the bridal shirt, and went to the hearth to prepare supper; — awhile after, Olaf sat snugly and comfortably benched, a steaming pudding between himself and Kari.

The words interchanged signified little; they were only such as on the common road pass from mouth to mouth, without touching either soul or thought. Had Kari uttered a single one of those with which she spoke to her young memory, then Olaf, too, could have done the same; and their words would have been as questions and answers from the heart of hearts. For when he struggled up the mountain to her dwelling, bending and panting, every step seeming to carry his poor body toward the grave, — he appeared to be borne forward,

with a strange yearning, toward the young, laughing Kari, who was surely standing behind the door to startle him, or dart out over the meadow, like an enticing fairy, challenging pursuit, and afterward coming in shyly to receive all his tender words with her happiest smile.

But they never spoke their thoughts; and so they sat so near, known to each other in soul and thought, and yet so distant in word and manner. The tree of life which at the same time had shot its root downward in each of their hearts, and taken its sudden growth upward in light and joy, was cut down in its spring time; yet sap enough remained in the root for its many sproutings, although trunk and crown it had nevermore.

And such was Knapstad Kari's and Old Olaf's hard life. In a certain sense they were as yet engaged; for, when apart, they lived in the past, and it drew them toward each other. Quietly and unspoken each felt a right to the other: the unattainable both separated and united them.

To-day, for the first time in many years, Kari had spoken to Olaf of the bygone years and his wasted life; but it was because, in the young girl she was nursing, she had before her a picture of her own misery. The bitterness she had so long been gathering, drop by drop, now overflowed her heart's brim, causing it to contract with insufferable pain. She had never before seen the truth so unvarnished as now. . . . "It was not Olaf Grav-seid, it was Old Olaf."

"I think Olaf was more feeble to day than I have ever before seen him," sighed Kari, after he had gone. "God grant he may soon get through and go to rest!"

"I think Kari was not as kind as usual," muttered Old Olaf, as he sat upon a rock, taking a little rest before descending.

"Oh, yes! . . . she is right," he sighed awhile afterward. "All I do is indolence. It seems as if one was busy with such trade. It even becomes bustle. Ah, yes! if only one knew what to do with himself! There rises something in me now and then like another man, standing gazing at me, as if it would speak,—yes, I could swear it is so; but I get so frightened I am on the point of screaming, and then it disappears. . . . Oh, yes! God help me!"

At this moment the sun sank behind the mountain, throwing a faint yellow hue over the western horizon. A fresh breeze brought the hum from the market-place up toward Old Olaf, where he sat gazing around, as if seeking some object of comfort; for the gloom he had brought up here, had not, as usual, disappeared in Knapstad Kari's house. On the contrary, it had increased; and his soul was full to despair.

Now a shout was borne upward, then a sound of noisy merriment.

"The hubbub is going again!" he exclaimed sadly, listening.

Again he heard the wild shouts mingled with laughter and boisterousness.

"I must go down there," he sighed, relieved, and rose. "No one knows but I could sell something."

"Ho, ho!" came from a single voice in the crowd.

"Ho, ho!" shouted Old Olaf, making a leap; and that moment he was transformed. His eyes shone, his countenance rose, his shoulders straightened a little, and his whole crestfallen appearance fell from him like a dried husk, which had not imprisoned his boldness, only concealed it while growing.

And so but little time elapsed between that, in which he sat on the mountain, sighing over his sinful nature,

and this, when animated and lively he limped over the smooth wood-path, toward the market-place.

"Hallo! Old Olaf!" shouted a hoarse voice to him, from a small gathering of half-drunken men, standing by a stall. "What have you in your trunk?"

"Food for the soul of us both," said Olaf, solemnly, pushing nearer.

"Have you?" said the man. "Ah! then it is needed, — so come here with your trunk."

"You will have to let me take care of my own things," said Olaf, pushing him boldly from him.

"Is it true you have a song about the devil of America?" asked a tall boy with sleepy countenance, who, with hands in his pockets, had pushed through the crowd to him.

"I don't know as the devil is any different there from what he is here," answered Old Olaf, stiffly.

"Yes," said the boy, with a knowing grin to the bystanders. "He has both a cloven foot and horns of pure gold; and here they are no different from every bull's."

"Puh! What ungodly prattle!" exclaimed an old woman, standing at a table selling drink.

"Never you care for that, mammy," laughed a tall, stoutly built boy, with an open, sunburnt face. "How is it with your humor, Old Olaf?" turning to him. "I think you were weeping when you sat away there on the mountain."

"I have not much more than I need, Thore," answered Old Olaf, in a friendly way, trying to avoid him.

"Come here and drink, so it will increase," said he, taking hold of his arm. "Besides, I must make up for kicking your trunk down the mountain."

"Thank you," answered Old Olaf, timidly; "but I think I would rather not."

"Rather not!" exclaimed Thore, holding a glass to Olaf's lips. "There, drink! must one ask you twice?"

Old Olaf stood a moment hesitatingly, but finally took the glass and sipped.

"Down to the last drop, old hawk! it's Thore Sten's treat!"

Olaf emptied the glass and limped to the table to set it down; but now there was no shyness about him: he measured Thore with the same unshrinking eye as anybody else.

"How many such glasses do you need to make you a man?" asked Thore, laughing loudly.

"I think as many as you need to become a woman," answered Olaf, swallowing at one draught another glass.

"One can't see such a small dwarf: you must stand on the table so we can look at you," said Thore, taking him under both arms and lifting him up on a table by his side.

And then Old Olaf became reckless; and, like the dwarf at the queen's court, he performed a dance among rolling glasses and bottles, causing irrepressible laughter from the whole crowd; and at last leaped from the table and flung himself around Thore's neck, who instantly seized and threw him, like a bundle, to the other side; where he lay bewildered and senseless on the flat ground, while the trunk tumbled from the table to the road.

"Come here with his trunk," said Thore to a half-grown boy, who was endeavoring to force open the lid.

"You sha'n't have it," was the reply: "I'm going to see the song about his sweetheart."

"What business have you got with that?" shouted Thore, laughing.

"I want to see how they write a love-ditty," continued the lad, stubbornly pulling at the lid.

But now Old Olaf had recovered a little and crept up, reaching for the trunk.

"Now you sha'n't have it till I've seen the song about your sweetheart," cried the boy, holding on.

"The boy's right. A fellow's got to learn when he's young," said Thore, taking the trunk and forcing it open with a jerk.

"Give me my trunk!" panted Olaf, raising himself up on his knee, and extending both arms toward it.

"Now, boy, look out for the song," exclaimed Thore, as he turned the trunk bottom upward, scattering its contents upon the ground.

"Don't you dare touch it!" exclaimed Old Olaf, creeping yet nearer. "Don't touch it," he repeated imploringly, drawing himself together in helplessness and pain.

But his threat and pleading were empty sounds which no one heeded. Curiosity overcame regard; and within a couple of minutes all the scraps were seized by the bystanders, each studying his, aloud or silently, as best he liked.

"Here is the song!" cried the boy, holding a worn, folded paper high above his head.

"Let me see!" shouted Thore, snatching at it.

"Get it and give it to me, Thore!" asked Old Olaf, rising again up on his knees.

"No: we've got to see what kind of a fellow you are, — if you can put together a real song," laughed Thore, smoothing out the paper before a lantern which stood on the table, throwing a weak gleam in the twilight. And he read, in a fumbling way: —

“ There lives a maiden at Gråvseid,
As fair as a lily-kerchiefed bride;
A beautiful, healthy, happy thing,
And a bride she will be in the spring.”

“ Oh, no! oh, no, Thore! that you should bring me such shame!” panted Old Olaf, throwing his arms around Thore’s strong limbs, and looking up to him with bursting eye.

“ Let go my leg, dog!” said Thore, angrily, kicking him so that he fell over into the road, and then continued singing: —

“ Her eyes are bright as the summer bloom,
And her cheeks as red as a rose of June;
Graceful in motion, quick in word,
Just like a beautiful, twittering bird.”

“ Just like a beautiful, twittering bird,” repeated the boy, and a couple of twanging voices chimed in.

“ Yes: my sweetheart shall be so, only pure sunshine and summer!” shouted the boy.

“ Hush!” said Thore: “ one can’t be heard for that snipe.”

“ Give me my song, Thore,” implored Olaf, who had approached the crowd again. “ It’s the last thing I have in this world,” he gasped like one dying.

“ Where is your handsome girl?” cried the boy: “ I want to know where she is.”

“ O poor one!” said an old woman. “ That flower has withered long ago! It is Knapstad Kari, I guess, up there on the mountain.”

“ Hush!” said Thore, and continued singing, while all listened: —

“ There goes a youth o’er the hills away,
Who dreams of this maiden night and day;
He calls her name, and every time
Her voice replies in a loving chime.”

“ Nobody knows his path of joy,
Or sees its goal like the dreaming boy, —
The glad spring budding, the loved by his side,
He a bridegroom, and she a bride.”

“ He a bridegroom, and she a bride,” chimed in the whole crowd, merrily.

But now a form rose before Thore: it was Old Olaf, looking as if he had grown a foot since he last spoke; the crippled limbs were stretched with superhuman strength, his visage was white as a linen cloth, and his eyes shot pale lightning.

“ What do you want of me?” asked Thore, deridingly, endeavoring to push him back.

“ I will give you to choose between your life and my song,” said Old Olaf, firmly. He looked at this moment like a dying warrior, who raises himself for the combat, but, his strength departing in the effort, sinks upon his knees in death.

For a few moments they measured sight and will, the one fully equal to the other.

Then Thore burst into a scornful laugh, and sung the last verse: —

“ But the spring sun came, and summer noon,
And the autumn nights, and withered bloom;
But never the joyful message hied
That he was bridegroom, and she was bride.”

“ Do you like this measure?” asked Old Olaf, holding out his dirk a little from his side, with his thumb set firmly against the middle of the blade.

"I can always take a little more than common measure," answered Thore, drawing his dirk, and placing his thumb a little nearer the handle.

"Ho, ho! we can afford to increase it, if you please," exclaimed Old Olaf, laughing, and driving the point of his blade into Thore's arm.

The moment Thore lifted his arm and suddenly set his eye upon Olaf, a new thought seemed to enter his mind; and slowly he replaced his dirk in his sheath, while Old Olaf madly continued stabbing, now his arms, now his breast, — the blood trickling over vest and coat.

"Enough of such play," said Thore, coolly, parrying with his hand a blow, which Olaf, in uncontrollable fury, aimed at his face; but by this the knife was driven with still greater force into the hollow of his hand, and remained sticking in the wound.

"Uh!" exclaimed Thore, maddened with pain, striking Olaf's arm with his doubled fist, so that it fell disabled, and at the same time tearing from his hand the knife and throwing it away.

"You want to have it appear to-night as if you were Olaf Gravseid, Limpy!" said Thore, sneering, "but I will let you see who you are, my lad;" and saying this he took hold of Olaf's body with his broad hand, lifting him above his head, and shaking him like a dusty garment, to the amusement and satisfaction of the whole crowd.

"Do you see now it is Old Olaf?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" they answered in chorus.

"Yes! then he isn't needed here," exclaimed Thore, laughing; and he threw him like a ball over towards the meadow, where the hill rose up to the church.

Olaf lay awhile stunned by the fall: then he rose and staggered a short distance, fell again; rose, and the same

was repeated, until at last he tumbled down with a loosened rock, which was balancing on the edge of a little precipice.

For a while no one cared about him; but when the laughter and noise abated a little, one and another began to wonder that Old Olaf had given up; for no one had ever known him to do so, when once he had begun.

So they went to look for him; and he was found lying by the hill, the stone upon his back. When he was carefully taken up, no one could tell whether life remained or not.

A heavy feeling of remorse fell upon all; for not one could exempt himself from guilt in the affair. Not one but had taken part in the scoffing laughter which had maddened the unfortunate wretch. Not one of those who now stood around the senseless body in bewildered silence, had a little before considered how deeply a jeering word can sink into a wounded and despairing heart; for sensibility constitutes the depth of the heart, and only this sensibility can measure it. Now, at once, they understood this.

A while before, none cared the least for Old Olaf; however often they called him "Poor Cripple," and "Poor helpless one," no feeling of compassion accompanied the words. They were empty sounds. Now a multitude of anxious thoughts for him was thronging every soul; each one seeking carefully in memory for a good word, or even thought, given Old Olaf, to atone a little for their present sin; and, had he just now opened his eyes to life, he certainly would have expected henceforth to rest in Abraham's bosom.

But he opened them not. Immovable as death he remained lying there. Now Thore came up and bent forward; while another boy, who accompanied him,

lifted the senseless body, carefully placing it on Thore's back ; and then, quiet and strong, he arose and went away, taking the woodpath up the mountain ; the boy who assisted walking closely behind.

"Alas ! now he goes to his sweetheart," sighed the old woman, bursting into tears.

But no one replied ; each was busy with his own thoughts, and the crowd dispersed, crestfallen and sorrowful ; for here was a wrong committed for which they could not atone ; and such, in true unseared hearts, is a worm that never dies.

A fresh, fragrant autumn breeze was fanning the mountain, as the next morning Kari wended her way from Bergslien to her little house.

Alas ! she could hardly endure to look at it, standing there in the daylight, as if the sunbeams were sporting around it ; beckoning and winking to her, with a golden brooch in each of its glittering panes. It seemed as if all the comfort and peace it would fain welcome her to, had been only so much taken from him ; for, for the first time in many years, he had been shut from the door which was always opened at the first sight of his stooping figure peering up over the mountain side.

But when she stepped into the only room in the house, and saw Olaf lying, deathly pale, upon the bed, and Thore sitting upon a little stool beside him, she experienced neither dread nor agitation ; at a single glance she saw to the bottom of what had happened, and quietly took a seat by the door.

"I brought him here," whispered Thore, rising from the stool, "because I thought he would get the best nursing with you."

"Who struck him?" asked Kari firmly, looking Thore directly in the eye.

"I didn't strike him, but I provoked him, which was as bad, perhaps," answered Thore, humbly.

"You treated him as you did the girl, from whom you took foothold and eyesight, and let the mountain 'do the rest?'" exclaimed Kari, a little scornfully, as she rose and took a seat beside the bed.

Thore stood struck by her hard words, his eyes fixed upon the floor. There was a dark contest in his soul the while, a struggle between selfishness and conscience; and powerful champions they were, born and nourished in the same heart.

A long time he stood thus. Deep silence rested upon the room; the breath of the sick man was unheard, and Kari sat absorbed in her sorrow. Then Thore awoke as it were from a dream, and passed his hand over his forehead.

"Kari!" he exclaimed imploringly, and would have said more, but his voice failed, and he gasped like a fish on the shore.

Kari turned her grief-worn face towards him. He uttered Sigrid's name, but again was unable to proceed, and, sinking upon a bench, burst into tears.

"You may not care for her," said Kari, turning from him again.

"I must know one thing," he whispered awhile after: "I must know how the girl is?"

"The girl will get well, I think, if you only let her have peace," answered Kari, dryly.

"She shall have peace, as far as I am concerned," said Thore, rising with strong resolution.

But now the sick man began to pant and grasp with his hands.

"My song!" he cried, opening widely his eyes, and looking threateningly around.

"Here is your song, Olaf," said Thore, softly, taking a soiled paper from his vest, and laying it upon the sick one's bosom.

Now a great change came over Olaf. The stiff look of death relaxed and little by little disappeared, while a mild dew overspread his eye. He carried his right hand to his breast and fumbled around for the paper, until he felt it, then his hand clenched it, and his eye looked up at Thore as if he would offer him defiance unto death.

"I shall never in the world harm you or any other man more," said Thore, patting tenderly Olaf's arm.

"Our Lord help you to stand by those words," sighed Kari, wiping the fast flowing tears.

"Hear, Kari," said Thore, in a tone of fervent entreaty: "take a message from me to Sigrid,—tell her Thore goes down to the valley for awhile. Tell her he isn't happy, for he has lost what was dearest to him. But if he comes up again, it will be in a good hour and she can receive him well."

"I shall tell her so," answered Kari.

"Don't venture there," panted old Olaf: "it won't be well for you."

"One must be tried before he is proved," said Thore: "I can reach farther than you, Olaf."

"The devil can reach farthest," replied Olaf, writhing with pain.

"No: the Lord God in Heaven reaches farthest!" exclaimed Kari; "for the devil demolishes, but the Lord builds up."

"Give me a good word, Olaf, it may help me in a lonely hour," pleaded Thore, with sad fervency, bending over the sick man.

"My trunk, Thore," he replied.

“You shall have it,” said Thore, and bade good-by to Knapstad Kari.

A while after he descended the mountain with a light heart, borne high by his good resolution and strong will. To be sure, he saw two masters on his road; and knew that he could serve either, but only one in uprightness. He must make a choice; and he understood, that, if it were the right one, selfishness must be conquered, and humility suffered to rule.

Humble he had been during this long night at the sick-bed, so humble that he could find nothing with which to comfort himself in any part of his past life. First he saw himself in his pride, when, whatever path he took, he always felt in the right; then, in the midst of evil, and conscience sat in constant judgment against him. True, at the beginning of his self-examination it seemed as if this were the only time he had ever committed a wrong; for such deep, insufferable dissatisfaction at himself he had never before experienced. Taking this view of the case, he could yet compare himself favorably with the world around him; but the similarity gradually grew fainter as his sorrow sank deeper, and at last it disappeared like a web at a breath, the conduct of his whole life seeming to him as one great wrong. But from this again he rose in the strength of a new resolve, to steer, henceforth, against the current by which he had hitherto been borne. . . . So the chrysalis bursts its cover for a new life; but before it has wings it must creep.

And now Knapstad Kari sat at the sick-bed, where she was both doctor and minister. She had a peculiar perception of the signs of life and death, which only came by careful pondering; and so long as she was still in doubt she took no rest, but went very busily around,

doubtfully muttering to herself. When she became certain of the real condition of her patient, firmly and quietly she seated herself at the bedside. And, better or worse, the sick one felt safe in her presence ; for, whether these indications were of life or death, her opinion was easily read in her countenance and whole manner. She made no effort to hide the truth. Whatever it was, "it was God's will ; and no murmur was to be heard against it."

Days and weeks passed. The sunlight paled, and only at noon a faint yellow tinge glittered on the window-panes of the old house, never falling in beyond the sill ; finally, this, too, disappeared ; and the winter, with silent, unyielding obstinacy, closed in around them. And yet this was well enough, so long as it remained silent ; but when it let out its powerful voice, speaking with the storm's tongue, all animate and inanimate things shuddered in their impotency ; and Kari's shaking dwelling, which stood there in the middle of the mountain plain, with the snow hills around the walls and reaching over upon the lower roof, looked as if sunk upon knee to the invader, and unable to rise.

Now it was hard for Kari to struggle along the snow-drifted mountain, seeking once in a while what was necessary for her patient. For herself she had no thought : the little she needed became less each day ; for with sinking nature sink also its demands. And yet, although not the merriest, this was the happiest time of her life.

The Bergsli house was her nearest resort, and there she never applied in vain. Sigrid did not forget her help in the moment of peril, and could never feel sufficiently grateful to the one who had been her harbinger from Thore ; for now she no longer shrank in dread from

a sudden and sad meeting in any path she might follow, but she looked with comfort out over the winter with its drifting snow to an expected summer.

However, it appeared to her, that Kari stooped more and looked thinner every time she came, but the thought only went as a twinkle through her mind. Sigrid had no clear understanding of what now was: she only looked longingly forward to that which was to be.

Meanwhile Olaf lay quietly musing, without any comprehension of what was so swiftly approaching. True, he saw the snow drive past the small window-panes, and, when the wind blew, filter like small dust-clouds through crevices about the frame; but notwithstanding, his thoughts were always of the spring, fresh and beautiful as ever, and how, trunk in hand, down the mountain he was going, limping and tumbling, doing the best he could, provided only he went quickly forward.

But at such times he felt that he must conceal the thought from Kari; for, just as the beautiful picture with spring sun and flowers was completed, a frost-night would fall upon it from her quiet eye, and then all was death wherever he looked. . . . and no way of egress into life.

So he struggled against the thought, scoffing and fretting at it, and exhibiting the vigor of two trembling arms.

. . . Kari departed not from the truth. Then he would implore and weep. Surely he must live, — he, who had such desire for life.

“Oh, no! oh, no!” sighed Kari, bowing herself in humble weeping: “such a star glittering in the eye is not a light for this earth; such fire-red roses on a withered cheek are not to twine in a wreath of life.”

At length came the heavy moment in which, like a waving cobweb suspended from tree to tree, his last hope

hung over him: still he grasped for it, gathering his weakness for a strong effort.

"Kari," he exclaimed, turning toward her, and would have said more, but the short breath took the word from him. It was unneeded, she understood perfectly.

"Oh, yes, my friend! it is death," she whispered mildly.

He gazed at her awhile with effort, then heavily closed his eyes, and an expression of pain passed over his face.

The cob-web had broken.

Kari rose from her seat beside his bed, and tottered with her feeble body to the rose-painted chest, from which she drew the old sewing-work that had made her Sabbath joyful during so many years; a hymn-book was unrolled from a piece of cloth; needle and thread were taken from a small till in the chest; and, with these in hand, she crept softly back and resumed watch by the sufferer.

A deep stillness pervaded the old house; no clock marked the passage of time; no sound proclaimed the victory of life.

And Kari sewed. The trembling hand drew the thread with unsteady haste, and the red cross-stitches connected themselves unevenly with each other; but it did not appear so to her. Her eye followed the needle with fervent satisfaction: once in a while she held it up to the light as if for a better view; and it was all well done. Icy cold was around her, but she perceived it not: there was no thought for herself, and for the dying there was warmth enough.

Suddenly Olaf opened his eyes, and fastened an inquiring look upon her: it seemed as if he were thinking earnestly of something. Kari nodded tenderly to him.

"You look so happy, Kari," he whispered.

"Yes: I am so," she answered with a glad tone: "when one finishes a work of forty years, one ought to seem happy."

"It is your bridal shirt—you understand?" said she, spreading it out upon the bed before him. "Only the name now, and it is done. You must have it on in the presence of our Lord, so I have hurried; and here you have the name. . . . Here you see O, that is for Olaf; and here you see G, that is for Gravseid . . . Olaf Gravseid . . . Something of a name that!"

At the same moment she looked up at the sick man, who was panting heavily. A wild gleam shot from his eye, and he began throwing up his arms, as if to protect himself against an enemy.

"Do you see him there?" he gasped: "Old Olaf! . . . See how he creeps up here . . . seize him! . . . don't let go your hold! . . . there! down the mountain with him." . . .

"In Jesus' name," sighed Kari, placing her hand upon his breast.

"Now—so . . . let him lie there, the rascal," he continued, more quietly: "useless rag he was . . . boaster and liar . . . God's words in his trunk, and the devil in his heart . . . Shame!" . . .

"So, let him lie where he is," interrupted Kari.

Suddenly, with full strength, he rose in bed, gazing at her with his wild eye.

"Do you know who struck him?" he asked: . . . "it was Olaf, the proud lad from Gravseid!"

And with this the spear was broken by Him who eternally bears victory. Mildly and submissively he yielded to Kari, who laid him back upon his pillow; and instantly he fell into a quiet sleep, and the soul prepared for its flight out over the borders of time.

It was already long past noon, and yet Olaf slept. A varying expression now and then passed over his face, a speaking without words, during which the old man was gradually passing away; and then clearness and peace rested upon his visage. The struggle was over, and the dust received its honor back.

Listening in breathless expectation, Kari sat bending over him: it almost seemed as if she would catch the flying soul, to give it her last loving farewell on its way.

Now Olaf opened his eyes, fixing upon her a look of reciprocal tenderness. The wild expression was gone; and the gleam of the dawn of an eternal day shone upon her.

"In Jesus' name?" she whispered, looking at him with fervent, loving inquiry.

A slight effort to move the lips, a motion of the head, and an indescribable look of responsive feeling was the answer. Then he sank together; and soul and body for this life parted.

Day declined rapidly; and, in the sunset, isolated blood-red rays shot between the heavy masses of cloud. Now and then a fierce blast of wind, with hollow sound, like a threatening signal, swept over the mountain, whirling the snow in columns to the sky; then suddenly, as by a whim, letting go its powerful gripe, while silence and dread spread themselves over the solitary plain.

But in the middle of this desert, busy and particular, as if a whole world's attention was upon her work, Kari took care of the dead. It should never be said that Olaf Gravseid was laid as a rag in his coffin, she thought; and this, too, became the powerful driving-wheel that kept her at work, when, without it, her trembling limbs were useless.

At last the heavy task was completed, and Olaf lay in

his bridal shirt on the bed. A small table, covered with a linen cloth, was placed at its side, upon which a lamp was lighted, and a hymn-book lay open. Now Kari stood awhile, contemplating her work.

"Nothing could be improved. Olaf had never looked so beautiful as at this moment." And her thoughts involuntarily turned toward herself. "Alas! how she looked! it was little becoming an approaching feast . . . and too, at daybreak, she must go out upon the mountain for help . . . there was much yet to be done."

With these thoughts Kari sought out from the chest her choicest dress, and laid aside the one she wore: but for every new article she put on, there was a little hesitation; one thing was too large, another too small.

Finally her dressing was completed; but ere this the night was already far advanced. Yet Kari imagined that she was both active and thoughtful; and, as she was in the habit of saying to herself, "not a child any longer." But she did not quite understand, that it is the same with the sinking as with the rising abilities: the one wills what it cannot yet perform, the other cannot perform what it yet wills. Weakness is the cause in both cases.

Awhile after Kari sat at the table firmly and solemnly, for now all things were in order. She took the hymn-book and began singing from her innermost heart what seemed to her befitting. Out upon the night the storm increased, going its wild, giant march around the shaking house: the immense snow masses were loosened from the ground and whirled upward, so that heaven and earth disappeared in the endless thickening. Kari heeded it not. She sang, and there was a strength in her voice and a wonderful music in her tones; yet no human sound was audible, it was only in her imagination.

And stanza followed stanza . . . Whence came the

swift flowing words? Why did they shine as glittering gold upon a withered ground? . . . They poured over her faster and faster; at last uniting, like a beautiful handwriting of sun and stars; and she closed her eyelids, because of her dazzled sight. But in behind them, also, there arose a light which did not pain her eye, weary with weeping; softly, like a radiant day, it spread out over mountain and plain, bearing upward on a shining cloud, the dark stone church. And there was festival everywhere, where the tired soul was bidding adieu to a vanishing life . . . Marriage festival was there! A bride stood amidst a gathering of smiling maidens, she herself as fair as a sun of pure joy; and the bridal crown glittering in the day like yellow gold. . . . Opposite stood the bridegroom, erect and strong as a pine on the mountain; noble and bold among men. . . . And how her heart yearned toward him! Yearned so it drew her every breath — so it emptied her whole soul — and took the last sigh.

Daybreak came, and the evening twilight of both this and the following day, and yet no Kari appeared along the mountain.

Then Sigrid Bergslien became anxious; for six days Knapstad Kari had not been seen. What could have happened? As long back as she could remember, three days had never before passed in which she had not spoken with her. . . . Some misfortune must have occurred. And when evening came and the day's work was ended, taking with her an abundance of the necessities of life, she hastened rapidly forward over the frozen snow.

A heavy suspicion fell upon her, as she stood before the door of Knapstad Kari's house. Such intense, incomprehensible silence had never before fallen upon her

soul. It was as if she stood there, the only living one upon the whole earth, and eternity were yawning around her.

She put her ear listening to the door: no sound was heard from within. She crept to the window, the storm had torn the rag from the sash. She peeped in: large piles of snow lay inside, and, excepting this, she could distinguish nothing clearly, for the pale reflection of the snow was the only light, and she stepped back.

But, oh, thank God! Some one rose and advanced toward the door.

"Oh, no! I was so scared, Kari!" exclaimed the girl, relieved as the door opened. But, as if rooted with dread, she stood still before the step; for it was not Kari, as she had thought: it was Thore Sten who stepped out toward her.

"Shall we meet so, Sigrid?" he whispered, in a trembling voice.

Sigrid was unable to speak, and only gazed upon him.

"You look so good, Sigrid. You appear as if you wished me well."

"I don't know as I have ever wished you ill," she said quietly.

"Oh, no, my worst enemy was myself," he sighed; "but now I have proved my resolution, Sigrid, and all is right excepting with you."

"Is this so? I am glad!" whispered Sigrid mildly.

"Yes. I meant to spend the night here, and toward morning go over to your house. . . Now it is as though you had come to meet me, Sigrid. Let this be a good sign!"

"I have something here for Knapstad Kari; she may need it very much," said Sigrid, with emotion, stepping upon the sill.

"Oh, no! Sigrid dear!" exclaimed Thore, sadly, taking both her hands: "neither Olaf nor Kari will need any thing more in this world. They are both dead. I came just at sundown, and since then have been sitting here, thinking upon much." ¶

Then he led the trembling girl into the room, where, seating themselves upon Kari's rosy chest, they talked of life as best they could with death before their eyes. And so they remained during the night, neither by request or consent, but as meeting in one thought.

When morning broke, they commenced putting the room in order. The snow which lay upon every thing was swept out; and, at Thore's suggestion, a place was arranged, where he laid Kari, side by side with her beloved. "For now

'He is bridegroom, and she is bride,'

as it stands in her song," he exclaimed, looking into Sigrid's mild countenance, with timid entreaty.

Again they met in one thought, which rose above their sorrow just as bright and glad as the morning sun above the snowy landscape; and, comforted, they wended their way homeward to Bergsli, while the sunbeams shed their festal light around Old Olaf's and Knapstad Kari's quiet bridal chamber.



THE
RAILROAD AND THE CHURCHYARD.

FROM THE
NORWEGIAN OF BJORNSTJERNE BJORNSON.





THE
RAILROAD AND THE CHURCHYARD.

I.

CANUTE AAKRE belonged to an ancient family of the parish, where it had always been distinguished for its intelligence and care for the public good. His father through self-exertion had attained to the ministry, but had died early, and his widow being by birth a peasant, the children were brought up as farmers. Consequently Canute's education was only of the kind afforded by the public school; but his father's library had early inspired him with a desire for knowledge, which was increased by association with his friend Henrik Wergeland, who often visited him or sent him books, seeds for his farm, and much good counsel. Agreeably to his advice, Canute early got up a club for practice in debating and study of the constitution, but which finally became a practical agricultural society, for this and the surrounding parishes. He also established a parish library, giving his father's books as its first endowment, and organized in his own house a Sunday-school for persons wishing to learn penmanship, arithmetic, and history. In this way the attention of the

public was fixed upon him, and he was chosen a member of the board of parish-commissioners, of which he soon became chairman. Here he continued his endeavors to advance the school interests, which he succeeded in placing in an admirable condition.

Canute Aakre was a short-built, active man, with small sharp eyes and disorderly hair. He had large lips which seemed constantly working, and a row of excellent teeth which had the same appearance, for they shone when he spoke his clear sharp words, which came out with a snap, as when the sparks are emitted from a great fire.

Among the many he had helped to an education, his neighbor Lars Hogstad stood foremost. Lars was not much younger than Canute, but had developed more slowly. Being in the habit of talking much of what he read and thought, Canute found in Lars—who bore a quiet, earnest manner—a good listener, and step by step a sensible judge. The result was, that he went reluctantly to the meetings of the board, unless first furnished with Lars Hogstad's advice, concerning whatever matter of importance was before it, which matter was thus most likely to result in practical improvement. Canute's influence, therefore, brought his neighbor in as a member of the board, and finally into every thing with which he himself was connected. They always rode together to the meetings, where Lars never spoke, and only on the road to and from, could Canute learn his opinion. They were looked upon as inseparable.

One fine autumn day, the parish-commissioners were convened, for the purpose of considering, among other matters, a proposal made by the Foged, to sell the public grain-magazine, and with the proceeds establish a sav-

ings-bank. Canute Aakre, the chairman, would certainly have approved this, had he been guided by his better judgment; but, in the first place, the motion was made by the Foged, whom Wergeland did not like, consequently neither did Canute; secondly, the grain-magazine had been erected by his powerful paternal grandfather, by whom it was presented to the parish. To him the proposal was not free from an appearance of personal offence; therefore, he had not spoken of it to any one, not even to Lars, who never himself introduced a subject.

As chairman, Canute read the proposal without comment, but, according to his habit, looked over to Lars, who sat as usual a little to one side, holding a straw between his teeth; this he always did when entering upon a subject, using it as he would a tooth-pick, letting it hang loosely in one corner of his mouth, or turning it more quickly or slowly, according to the humor he was in. Canute now saw with surprise, that the straw moved very fast. He asked quickly, "Do you think we ought to agree to this?"

Lars answered dryly, "Yes, I do."

The whole assembly feeling that Canute was of quite a different opinion, seemed struck, and looked at Lars, who said nothing further, nor was further questioned. Canute turned to another subject, as if nothing had happened, and did not again resume the question till toward the close of the meeting, when he asked with an air of indifference if they should send it back to the Foged for closer consideration, as it certainly was contrary to the mind of the people of the parish, by whom the grain-magazine was highly valued; also, if he should put upon the record, "Proposal deemed inexpedient."

"Against one vote," said Lars.

"Against two," said another instantly.

"Against three," said a third, and before the chairman had recovered from his surprise, a majority had declared in favor of the proposal.

He wrote; then read in a low tone, "Referred for acceptance, and the meeting adjourned." Canute, rising and closing the "Records," blushed deeply, but resolved to have this vote defeated in the parish meeting. In the yard he hitched his horse to the wagon, and Lars came and seated himself by his side. On the way home they spoke upon various subjects, but not upon this.

On the following day Canute's wife started for Lars' house, to inquire of his wife if any thing had happened between their husbands; Canute had appeared so queerly when he returned home the evening previous. A little beyond the house she met Lars' wife, who came to make the same inquiry on account of a similar peculiar behavior in her husband. Lars' wife was a quiet, timid thing, easily frightened, not by hard words, but by silence; for Lars never spoke to her unless she had done wrong, or he feared she would do so. On the contrary, Canute Aakre's wife spoke much with her husband, and particularly about the commissioners' meetings, for lately they had taken his thoughts, work, and love from her and the children. She was jealous of it as of a woman, she wept at night about it, and quarrelled with her husband concerning it in the day. But now she could say nothing; for once he had returned home unhappy; she immediately became much more so than he, and for the life of her she must know what was the matter. So as Lars' wife could tell her nothing, she had to go for information out in the parish, where she obtained it, and of course was instantly of her husband's opinion, thinking Lars incomprehensible, not to say bad. But when

she let her husband perceive this, she felt that, notwithstanding what had occurred, no friendship was broken between them ; on the contrary, that he liked Lars very much.

The day for the parish meeting came. In the morning, Lars Hogstad drove over for Canute Aakre, who came out and took a seat beside him. They saluted each other as usual, spoke a little less than they were wont on the way, but not at all of the proposal. The meeting was full ; some, too, had come in as spectators, which Canute did not like, for he perceived by this a little excitement in the parish, Lars had his straw, and stood by the stove, warming himself, for the autumn had begun to be cold. The chairman read the proposal in a subdued and careful manner, adding, that it came from the Foged, who was not habitually fortunate. The building was a gift, and such things it was not customary to part with, least of all when there was no necessity for it.

Lars, who never before had spoken in the meetings, to the surprise of all, took the floor. His voice trembled ; whether this was caused by regard for Canute, or anxiety for the success of the bill, we cannot say ; but his arguments were clear, good, and of such a comprehensive and compact character as had hardly before been heard in these meetings. In concluding, he said :—

“Of what importance is it that the proposal is from the Foged?—none—, or who it was that erected the house, or in what way it became the public property?”

Canute, who blushed easily, turned very red, and moved nervously as usual when he was impatient ; but notwithstanding, he answered in a low, careful tone, that there were savings banks enough in the country, he thought, quite near, and almost too near. But if one

was to be instituted, there were other ways of attaining this end, than by trampling upon the gifts of the dead, and the love of the living. His voice was a little unsteady when he said this, but recovered its composure, when he began to speak of the grain magazine as such, and reason concerning its utility.

Lars answered him ably on this last, adding: "Besides, for many reasons I would be led to doubt whether the affairs of this parish are to be conducted for the best interests of the living, or for the memory of the dead; or further, whether it is the love and hate of a single family which rules, rather than the welfare of the whole."

Canute answered quickly: "I don't know whether the last speaker has been the one least benefited not only by the dead of this family, but also by its still living representative."

In this remark he aimed first at the fact that his powerful grandfather, had, in his day, managed the farm for Lars' grandfather, when the latter, on his own account, was on a little visit to the penitentiary.

The straw, which had been moving quickly for a long time, was now still:

"I am not in the habit of speaking everywhere of myself and family," said he, treating the matter with calm superiority; then he reviewed the whole matter in question, aiming throughout at a particular point. Canute was forced to acknowledge to himself, that he had never looked upon it from that standpoint, or heard such reasoning; involuntarily he had to turn his eye upon Lars. There he stood tall and portly, with clearness marked upon the strongly built forehead and in the deep eyes. His mouth was compressed, the straw still hung playing in its corner, but great strength lay around. He kept his hands behind him, standing erect, while his low deep

intonations seemed as if from the ground in which he was rooted. Canute saw him for the first time in his life, and from his inmost soul felt a dread of him; for unmistakably this man had always been his superior! He had taken all Canute himself knew or could impart, but retained only what had nourished this strong hidden growth.

He had loved and cherished Lars, but now that he had become a giant, he hated him deeply, fearfully; he could not explain to himself why he thought so, but he felt it instinctively, while gazing upon him; and in this forgetting all else, he exclaimed:—

“But Lars! Lars! what in the Lord’s name ails you?”

He lost all self-control,—“you, whom I have”—“you, who have”—he couldn’t get out another word, and seated himself, only to struggle against the excitement which he was unwilling to have Lars see; he drew himself up, struck the table with his fist, and his eyes snapped from below the stiff disorderly hair which always shaded them. Lars appeared as if he had not been interrupted, only turning his head to the assembly, asking if this should be considered the decisive blow in the matter, for in such a case nothing more need be said.

Canute could not endure this calmness.

“What is it that has come among us?” he cried. “Us, who to this day have never debated but in love and upright zeal? We are infuriated at each other as if incited by an evil spirit;” and he looked with fiery eyes upon Lars, who answered:—

“You yourself surely bring in this spirit, Canute, for I have spoken only of the case. But you will look upon it only through your own self-will; now we shall see if your love and upright zeal will endure, when once it is decided agreeably to our wish.”

“Have I not then taken good care of the interests of the parish?”

No reply. This grieved Canute, and he continued :

“Really, I did not think otherwise than that I had accomplished something ; — something for the good of the parish ; — but may be I have deceived myself.”

He became excited again, for it was a fiery spirit within him, which was broken in many ways, and the parting with Lars grieved him, so he could hardly control himself. Lars answered : —

“Yes, I know you give yourself the credit for all that is done here, and should one judge by much speaking in the meetings, then surely you have accomplished the most.”

“O, is it this !” shouted Canute, looking sharply upon Lars : “it is you who have the honor of it !”

“Since we necessarily talk of ourselves,” replied Lars, “I will say that all matters have been carefully considered by us before they were introduced here.”

Here little Canute Aakre resumed his quick way of speaking :

“In God’s name take the honor, I am content to live without it ; there are other things harder to lose !”

Involuntarily Lars turned his eye from Canute, but said, the straw moving very quickly : “If I were to speak my mind, I should say there is not much to take honor for ; — of course ministers and teachers may be satisfied with what has been done ; but, certainly, the common men say only that up to this time the taxes have become heavier and heavier.”

A murmur arose in the assembly, which now became restless. Lars continued : —

“Finally, to-day, a proposition is made which, if carried, would recompense the parish for all it has laid

out ; perhaps, for this reason, it meets such opposition. It is the affair of the parish, for the benefit of all its inhabitants, and ought to be rescued from being a family matter."

The audience exchanged glances, and spoke half audibly, when one threw out a remark as he rose to go to his dinner-pail, that these were "the truest words he had heard in the meetings for many years." Now all arose, and the conversation became general. Canute Aakre felt as he sat there, that the case was lost, fearfully lost ; and tried no more to save it. He had somewhat of the character attributed to Frenchmen, in that he was good for first, second, and third attacks, but poor for self-defence — his sensibilities overpowering his thoughts.

He could not comprehend it, nor could he sit quietly any longer ; so, yielding his place to the vice-chairman, he left, — and the audience smiled.

He had come to the meeting accompanied by Lars, but returned home alone, though the road was long. It was a cold autumn day ; the way looked jagged and bare, the meadow gray and yellow ; while frost had begun to appear here and there on the roadside. Disappointment is a dreadful companion. He felt himself so small and desolate, walking there ; but Lars was everywhere before him, like a giant, his head towering, in the dusk of evening, to the sky. It was his own fault that this had been the decisive battle, and the thought grieved him sorely : he had staked too much upon a single little affair. But surprise, pain, anger, had mastered him ; his heart still burned, shrieked, and moaned within him. He heard the rattling of a wagon behind ; it was Lars, who came driving his superb horse past him at a brisk trot, so that the hard road gave a sound of thunder. Canute gazed after him, as he sat there so broad-shouldered in

the wagon, while the horse, impatient for home, hurried on unurged by Lars, who only gave loose rein. It was a picture of his power; this man drove toward the mark! He, Canute, felt as if thrown out of his wagon to stagger along there in the autumn cold.

Canute's wife was waiting for him at home. She knew there would be a battle; she had never in her life believed in Lars, and lately had felt a dread of him. It had been no comfort to her that they had ridden away together, nor would it have comforted her if they had returned in the same way. But darkness had fallen, and they had not yet come. She stood in the doorway, went down the road and home again; but no wagon appeared. At last she hears a rattling on the road, her heart beats as violently as the wheels revolve; she clings to the doorpost, looking out; the wagon is coming; only one sits there; she recognizes Lars, who sees and recognizes her, but is driving past without stopping. Now she is thoroughly alarmed! Her limbs fail her; she staggers in, sinking on the bench by the window. The children, alarmed, gather around, the youngest asking for papa, for the mother never spoke with them but of him. She loved him because he had such a good heart, and now this good heart was not with them; but, on the contrary, away on all kinds of business, which brought him only unhappiness; consequently, they were unhappy too.

"Oh that no harm had come to him to-day! Canute was so excitable! Why did Lars come home alone? why didn't he stop?"

Should she run after him, or, in the opposite direction, toward her husband? She felt faint, and the children pressed around her, asking what was the matter; but this could not be told to them, so she said they must take supper alone, and, rising, arranged it and helped them.

She was constantly glancing out upon the road. He did not come. She undressed and put them to bed, and the youngest repeated the evening prayer, while she bowed over him, praying so fervently in the words which the tiny mouth first uttered, that she did not perceive the steps outside.

Canute stood in the doorway, gazing upon his little congregation at prayer. She rose; all the children shouted "Papa!" but he seated himself, and said gently:—

"Oh! let him repeat it."

The mother turned again to the bedside, that meantime he might not see her face; otherwise it would have been like intermeddling with his grief before he felt a necessity of revealing it. The child folded its hands,—the rest followed the example,—and it said:—

"I am now a little lad,
But soon shall grow up tall,
And make papa and mamma glad,
I'll be so good to all!
When in Thy true and holy ways,
Thou dear, dear God wilt help me keep;—
Remember now Thy name to praise
And so we'll try to go to sleep!"

What a peace now fell! Not a minute more had passed ere the children all slept in it as in the lap of God; but the mother went quietly to work arranging supper for the father, who as yet could not eat. But after he had gone to bed, he said:—

"Now, after this, I shall be at home."

The mother lay there, trembling with joy, not daring to speak, lest she should reveal it; and she thanked God for all that had happened, for, whatever it was, it had resulted in good.



II.

IN the course of a year, Lars was chosen head Justice of the Peace, chairman of the board of commissioners, president of the savings-bank, and, in short, was placed in every office of parish trust to which his election was possible. In the county legislature, during the first year, he remained silent, but afterward made himself as conspicuous as in the parish council; for here, too, stepping up to the contest with him who had always borne sway, he was victorious over the whole line, and afterward himself manager. From this he was elected to the Congress, where his fame had preceded him, and he found no lack of challenge. But here, although steady and independent, he was always retiring, never venturing beyond his depth, lest his post as leader at home should be endangered by a possible defeat abroad.

It was pleasant to him now in his own town. When he stood by the church-wall on Sundays, and the community glided past, saluting and glancing sideways at him, — now and then one stepping up for the honor of exchanging a couple of words with him, — it could almost be said that, standing there, he controlled the whole parish with a straw, which, of course, hung in the corner of his mouth.

He deserved his popularity; for he had opened a new road which led to the church; all this and much more resulted from the savings-bank, which he had instituted and now managed; and the parish, in its self-manage-

ment and good order, was held up as an example to all others.

Canute, of his own accord, quite withdrew, — not entirely at first, for he had promised himself not thus to yield to pride. In the first proposal he made before the parish board, he became entangled by Lars, who would have it represented in all its details; and, somewhat hurt, he replied: “When Columbus discovered America, he did not have it divided into counties and towns, — this came by degrees afterward;” upon which, Lars compared Canute’s proposition (relating to stable improvements) to the discovery of America, and afterward by the commissioners he was called by no other name than “Discovery of America.” Canute thought since his influence had ceased there, so also, had his duty to work; and afterwards declined re-election.

But he was industrious, and, in order still to do something for the public good, he enlarged his Sunday-school, and put it, by means of small contributions from the pupils, in connection with the mission cause, of which he soon became the centre and leader in his own and surrounding counties. At this, Lars remarked that, if Canute ever wished to collect money for any purpose, he must first know that its benefit was only to be realized some thousands of miles away.

There was no strife between them now. True, they associated with each other no longer, but saluted and exchanged a few words whenever they met. Canute always felt a little pain in remembering Lars, but struggled to overcome it, by saying to himself that it must have been so. Many years afterward at a large wedding party, where both were present and a little gay, Canute stepped upon a chair and proposed a toast to the chairman of the parish council, and the county’s first congressman. He

spoke until he manifested emotion, and, as usual, in an exceedingly handsome way. It was honorably done, and Lars came to him, saying, with an unsteady eye, that for much of what he knew and was, he had to thank him.

At the next election, Canute was again elected chairman.

But if Lars Hogstad had foreseen what was to follow, he would not have influenced this. It is a saying, that "all events happen in their time," and just as Canute appeared again in the council, the ablest men in the parish were threatened with bankruptcy, the result of a speculative fever which had been raging long, but now first began to react. They said that Lars Hogstad had caused this great epidemic, for it was he who had brought the spirit of speculation into the parish. This penny malady had originated in the parish board; for this body itself had acted as leading speculator. Down to the youth of twenty years, all were endeavoring by sharp bargains to make the one dollar, ten; extreme parsimony, in order to lay up in the beginning, was followed by an exceeding lavishness in the end: and as the thoughts of all were directed to money only, a disposition to selfishness, suspicion, and disunion, had developed itself, which at last turned to prosecutions and hatred. It was said that the parish board had set the example in this also; for one of the first acts, performed by Lars as chairman, was a prosecution against the minister, concerning doubtful prerogatives. The venerable pastor had lost, but had also immediately resigned. At the time some had praised, others denounced, this act of Lars; but it had proved a bad example. Now came the effects of his management in the form of loss to all the leading men of the parish; and consequently, the public opinion quickly changed. The opposite party immediately found

a champion ; for Canute Aakre had come into the parish board, — introduced there by Lars himself.

The struggle at once began. All those youths, who, in their time, had been under Canute Aakre's instruction, were now grown-up men, the best educated, conversant with all the business and public transactions in the parish ; Lars had now to contend against these and others like them, who had disliked him from their childhood. One evening after a stormy debate, as he stood on the platform outside his door, looking over the parish, a sound of distant threatening thunder came toward him from the large farms, lying in the storm. He knew that that day their owners had become insolvent, that he himself and the savings-bank were going the same way : and his whole long work would culminate in condemnation against him.

In these days of struggle and despair, a company of surveyors came one evening to Hogstad, which was the first farm at the entrance of the parish, to mark out the line of a new railroad. In the course of conversation, Lars perceived it was still a question with them whether the road should run through this valley, or another parallel one.

Like a flash of lightning it darted through his mind, that, if he could manage to get it through here, all real estate would rise in value, and not only he himself be saved, but his popularity handed down to future generations. He could not sleep that night, for his eyes were dazzled with visions ; sometimes he seemed to hear the noise of an engine. The next day he accompanied the surveyors in their examination of the locality ; his horses carried them, and to his farm they returned. The following day they drove through the other valley, he still with them, and again carrying them back home.

The whole house was illuminated, the first men of the parish having been invited to a party made for the surveyors, which terminated in a carouse that lasted until morning. But to no avail; for the nearer they came to the decision, the clearer it was to be seen that the road could not be built through here without great extra expense. The entrance to the valley was narrow, through a rocky chasm, and the moment it swung into the parish the river made a curve in its way, so that the road would either have to make the same — crossing the river twice — or go straight forward through the old, now unused, churchyard. But it was not long since the last burials there, for the church had been but recently moved.

Did it only depend upon a strip of an old churchyard, thought Lars, whether the parish should have this great blessing or not? — then he would use his name and energy for the removal of the obstacle. So immediately he made a visit to minister and bishop, from them to county legislature and Department of the Interior; he reasoned and negotiated; for he had possessed himself of all possible information concerning the vast profits that would accrue on the one side, and the feelings of the parish on the other, and had really succeeded in gaining over all parties. It was promised him that by the reinterment of some bodies in the new churchyard, the only objection to this line might be considered as removed, and the king's approbation guaranteed. It was told him that he need only make the motion in the county meeting.

The parish had become as excited on the question as himself. The spirit of speculation, which had been prevalent so many years, now became jubilant. No one spoke or thought of any thing but Lars' journey and its probable result. Consequently, when he returned with the most splendid promises, they made much ado about

him ; songs were sung to his praise, — yes, if at that time one after another of the largest farms had toppled over, not a soul would have given it any attention ; the former speculation fever had been succeeded by the new one of the railroad.

The county board met: an humble petition that the old churchyard might be used for the railroad was drawn up to be presented to the king. This was unanimously voted ; yes, there was even talk of voting thanks to Lars, and a gift of a coffee-pot, in the model of a locomotive. But finally, it was thought best to wait until everything was accomplished. The petition from the parish to the county board was sent back, with a requirement of a list of the names of all bodies which must necessarily be removed. The minister made out this, but instead of sending it directly to the county board, had his reasons for communicating it first to the parish. One of the members brought it to the next meeting. Here, Lars opened the envelope, and as chairman read the names.

Now it happened that the first body to be removed was that of Lars' own grandfather. A little shudder passed through the assembly ; Lars himself was taken by surprise ; but continued. Secondly, came the name of Canute Aakre's grandfather ; for the two had died at nearly the same time. Canute Aakre sprang from his seat ; Lars stopped ; all looked up with dread ; for the name of the elder Canute Aakre had been the one most beloved in the parish for generations. There was a pause of some minutes. At last Lars hemmed, and continued. But the matter became worse, for the further he proceeded, the nearer it approached their own day, and the dearer the dead became. When he ceased, Canute Aakre asked quietly if others did not think as he, that spirits were around them. It had begun to grow dusk in

the room, and although they were mature men sitting in company, they almost felt themselves frightened. Lars took a bundle of matches from his pocket and lit a candle, somewhat dryly remarking that this was no more than they had known beforehand.

"No," replied Canute, pacing the floor, "this is more than I knew beforehand. Now I begin to think that even railroads can be bought too dearly."

This electrified the audience, and Canute continued that the whole affair must be reconsidered, and made a motion to that effect. In the excitement which had prevailed, he said it was also true that the benefit to be derived from the road had been considerably overrated; for if it did not pass through the parish, there would have to be a depot at each extremity; true, it would be a little more trouble to drive there, than to a station within: yet not so great as that for this reason they should dishonor the rest of the dead. Canute was one of those who, when his thoughts were excited, could extemporize and present most sound reasons; he had not a moment previously thought of what he now said: but the truth of it struck all. Lars, seeing the danger of his position, thought best to be careful, and so apparently acquiesced in Canute's proposition to reconsider; for such emotions, thought he, are always strongest in the beginning; one must temporize with them.

But here he had miscalculated. In constantly increasing waves the dread of touching their dead overswept the parish: what no one had thought of as long as the matter existed only in talk, became a serious question when it came to touch themselves. The women particularly were excited, and at the parish house, on the day of the next meeting, the road was black with the gathered multitude. It was a warm summer day, the windows

were taken out, and as many stood without as within. All felt that that day would witness a great battle.

Lars came, driving his handsome horse, saluted by all; he looked quietly and confidently around, not seeming surprised at the throng. He seated himself, straw in mouth, near the window, and not without a smile saw Canute rise to speak, as he thought, for all the dead lying over there in the old churchyard.

But Canute Aakre did not begin with the churchyard. He made a stricter investigation into the profits likely to accrue from carrying the road through the parish, showing that in all this excitement they had been overestimated. He had calculated the distance of each farm from the nearest station, should the road be taken through the neighboring valley, and finally asked:

“Why has such a hurrah been made about this railroad, when it would not be for the good of the parish after all?”

This he could explain: there were those who had brought about such a previous disturbance, that a greater was necessary in order that the first might be forgotten. Then, too, there were those who, while the thing was new, could sell their farms and lands to strangers, foolish enough to buy; it was a shameful speculation, which not the living only but the dead also must be made to promote!

The effect produced by his address was very considerable. But Lars had firmly resolved, come what would, to keep cool, and smilingly replied that he supposed Canute Aakre himself had been anxious for the railroad, and surely no one would accuse him of understanding speculation. (A little laugh ensued.) Canute had had no objection to the removal of bodies of common people for the sake of the railroad, but when it came to that of

his own grandfather, the question became suddenly of vital importance to the whole parish. He said no more, but looked smilingly at Canute, as did also several others. Meanwhile, Canute Aakre surprised both him and them by replying :

"I confess it ; I did not realize what was at stake until it touched my own dead ; possibly this is a shame, but really it would have been a greater one not even then to have realized it, as is the case with Lars ! Never, I think, could Lars' raillery have been more out of place ; for folks with common feelings the thing is really revolting."

"This feeling has come up quite recently," answered Lars, "and so we will hope for its speedy disappearance also. It may be well to think upon what minister, bishop, county officers, engineers, and Department will say, if we first unanimously set the ball in motion and then come asking to have it stopped ; if we first are jubilant and sing songs, then weep and chant requiems. If they do not say that we have run mad here in the parish, at least they may say that we have grown a little queer lately."

"Yes, God knows, they can say so," answered Canute ; "we have been acting strangely enough during the last few days,—it is time for us to retract. It has really gone far when we can dig up, each his own grandfather, to make way for a railroad ; when in order that our loads may be carried more easily forward, we can violate the resting place of the dead. For is not overhauling our churchyard the same as making it yield us food ? What has been buried there in Jesus' name, shall we take up in the name of Mammon ? It is but little better than eating our progenitors' bones."

"That is according to the order of nature," said Lars, dryly.

"Yes, the nature of plants and animals," replied Canute.

"Are we not then animals?" asked Lars.

"Yes, but also the children of the living God, who have buried our dead in faith upon him; it is He who shall raise them, and not we."

"Oh, you prate! Are not the graves dug over at certain fixed periods anyway? What evil is there in that it happens some years earlier?" asked Lars.

"I will tell you! What was born of them yet lives; what they built yet remains; what they loved, taught and suffered for, is all around us and within us; and shall we not then let their bodies rest in peace?"

"I see by your warmth that you are thinking of your grandfather again," replied Lars; "and will say it is high time you ceased to bother the parish about him, for he monopolized space enough in his life time; it isn't worth while to have him lie in the way now he is dead. Should his corpse prevent a blessing to the parish that would reach to a hundred generations, we surely would have reason to say, that of all born here he has done us most harm."

Canute Aakre tossed back his disorderly hair, his eyes darted fire, his whole frame appeared like a drawn bow.

"What sort of a blessing this is that you speak of, I have already proved. It is of the same character as all the others which you have brought to the parish, namely a doubtful one. True enough you have provided us with a new church; but, too, you have filled it with a new spirit, — and not that of love. True, you have made us new roads, — but also new roads to destruction, as is now plainly evident in the misfortunes of many. True, you have lessened our taxes to the public; but, too, you have increased those to ourselves; — prosecutions, protests and

failures, are no blessing to a community. And you dare scoff at the man in his grave whom the whole parish blesses! You dare say he lies in our way,—yes, very likely he lies in your way. This is plainly to be seen; but over this grave you shall fall! The spirit which has reigned over you, and at the same time until now over us, was not born to rule, only to serve. The churchyard shall surely remain undisturbed; but to-day it numbers one more grave, namely, that of your popularity, which shall now be interred in it.”

Lars Hogstad rose, white as a sheet; he opened his mouth, but was unable to speak a word, and the straw fell. After three or four vain attempts to recover it and to find utterance, he belched forth like a volcano:

“Are these the thanks I get for all my toils and struggles? Shall such a woman-preacher be able to direct? Ah, then, the devil be your chairman if ever more I set my foot here! I have kept your petty business in order until to-day; and after me it will fall into a thousand pieces; but let it go now. Here are the ‘Records!’ (and he flung them across the table.) Out on such a company of wenches and brats! (striking the table with his fist.) Out on the whole parish, that it can see a man recompensed as I now am!”

He brought down his fist once more with such force, that the leaf of the great table sprang upward, and the inkstand with all its contents downward upon the floor, marking for coming generations the spot where Lars Hogstad, in spite of all his prudence, lost his patience and his rule.

He sprang for the door, and soon after was away from the house. The whole audience stood fixed,—for the power of his voice and his wrath had frightened them,—until Canute Aakre, remembering the taunt he had

received at the time of his fall, with beaming countenance and assuming Lars' voice, exclaimed:

"Is this the decisive blow in the matter?"

The assembly burst into uproarious merriment. The grave meeting closed amid laughter, talk, and high glee; only few left the place, those remaining called for drink, and made a night of thunder succeed a day of lightning. They felt happy and independent as in old days, before the time in which the commanding spirit of Lars had cowed their souls into silent obedience. They drank toasts to their liberty, they sung, yes, finally they danced, Canute Aakre with the vice chairman taking lead, and all the members of the council following, and boys and girls too, while the young ones outside shouted "hurrah!" for such a spectacle they had never before witnessed.





III.

LARS moved around in the large rooms at Hogstad without uttering a word. His wife who loved him, but always with fear and trembling, dared not so much as shew herself in his presence. The management of the farm and house had to go on as it would, while a multitude of letters were passing to and fro between Hogstad and the parish, Hogstad and the capital; for he had charges against the county board which were not acknowledged, and a prosecution ensued; against the savings-bank, which were also unacknowledged, and so came another prosecution. He took offence at articles in the "Christiana Correspondence," and prosecuted again, first the chairman of the county board, and then the directors of the savings-bank. At the same time there were bitter articles in the papers, which according to report were by him, and were the cause of great strife in the parish, setting neighbor against neighbor. Sometimes he was absent whole weeks at once, nobody knowing where, and after returning lived secluded as before. At church he was not seen after the grand scene in the representatives' meeting.

Then, one Saturday night, the mail brought news that the railroad was to go through the parish after all, and through the old churchyard. It struck like lightning into every home. The unanimous veto of the county board had been in vain; Lars Hogstad's influence had proved stronger. This was what his absence meant, this was

his work ! It was involuntary on the part of the people that admiration of the man and his dogged persistency should lessen dissatisfaction at their own defeat ; and the more they talked of the matter the more reconciled they seemed to become : for whatever has once been settled beyond all change developes in itself, little by little, reasons why it is so, which we are accordingly brought to acknowledge.

In going to church next day, as they encountered each other they could not help laughing ; and before the service, just as nearly all were convened outside, — young and old, men and women, yes, even children, — talking about Lars Hogstad, his talents, his strong will and his great influence, he himself with his household came driving up in four carriages. Two years had passed since he was last there. He alighted and walked through the crowd, when involuntarily all lifted their hats to him like one man ; but he looked neither to the right nor the left, nor returned a single salutation. His little wife, pale as death, walked behind him. In the house, the surprise became so great that, one after another, noticing him, stopped singing and stared. Canute Aakre, who sat in his pew in front of Lars', perceiving the unusual appearance and no cause for it in front, turned around and saw Lars sitting bowed over his hymn book, looking for the place.

He had not seen him until now since the day of the representatives' meeting, and such a change in a man he never could have imagined. This was no victor. His head was becoming bald, his face was lean and contracted, his eyes hollow and bloodshot, and the giant neck presented wrinkles and cords. At a glance he perceived what this man had endured, and was as suddenly seized with a feeling of strong pity, yes, even with a

touch of the old love. In his heart he prayed for him, and promised himself surely to seek him after service ; but, ere he had opportunity, Lars had gone. Canute resolved he would call upon him at his home that night, but his wife kept him back.

"Lars is one of the kind," said she, "who cannot endure a debt of gratitude: keep away from him until possibly he can in some way do you a favor, and then perhaps he will come to you."

However, he did not come. He appeared now and then at church, but nowhere else, and associated with no one. On the contrary, he devoted himself to his farm and other business with an earnestness which showed a determination to make up in one year for the neglect of many ; and, too, there were those who said it was necessary.

Railroad operations in the valley began very soon. As the line was to go directly past his house, Lars remodeled the side facing the road, connecting with it an elegant verandah, for of course his residence must attract attention. They were just engaged in this work when the rails were laid for the conveyance of gravel and timber, and a small locomotive was brought up. It was a fine autumn evening when the first gravel train was to come down. Lars stood on the platform of his house to hear the first signal, and see the first column of smoke ; all the hands on the farm were gathered around him. He looked out over the parish, lying in the setting sun, and felt that he was to be remembered so long as a train should roar through the fruitful valley. A feeling of forgiveness crept into his soul. He looked toward the churchyard, of which a part remained, with crosses bowing toward the earth, but a part had become railroad. He was just trying to define his feelings, when whistle went the first signal, and a while after the train came slowly along,

puffing out smoke mingled with sparks, for wood was used instead of coal; the wind blew toward the house, and standing there they soon found themselves enveloped in a dense smoke; but by and by, as it cleared away, Lars saw the train working through the valley like a strong will.

He was satisfied, and entered the house as after a long day's work. The image of his grandfather stood before him at this moment. This grandfather had raised the family from poverty to forehanded circumstances; true, a part of his citizen-honor had been lost, but forward he had pushed nevertheless. His faults were those of his time; they were to be found on the uncertain borders of the moral conceptions of that period, and are of no consideration now. Honor to him in his grave, for he suffered and worked; peace to his ashes. It is good to rest at last. But he could get no rest because of his grandson's great ambition. He was thrown up with stone and gravel. Pshaw! very likely he would only smile that his grandson's work passed above his head.

With such thoughts he had undressed and gone to bed. Again his grandfather's image glided forth. What did he wish. Surely he ought to be satisfied now, with the family's honor sounding forth above his grave; who else had such a monument? But yet, what mean these two great eyes of fire? This hissing, roaring, is no longer the locomotive, for see! it comes from the churchyard directly toward the house: an immense procession! The eyes of fire are his grandfather's, and the train behind are all the dead. It advances continually toward the house, roaring, crackling, flashing. The windows burn in the reflection of dead men's eyes . . . he made a mighty effort to collect himself, "For it was a dream, of course, only a dream; but let me waken! . . . See: now I am awake, come ghosts!"

And behold: they really come from the churchyard, overthrowing road, rails, locomotive and train with such violence that they sink in the ground; and then all is still there, covered with sod and crosses as before. But like giants the spirits advanced, and the hymn, "Let the dead have rest!" goes before them. He knows it; for daily in all these years it has sounded through his soul, and now it becomes his own requiem; for this was death and its visions. The perspiration started out over his whole body, for nearer and nearer, — and see there, on the window pane! there, there they are now; and he heard his name. Overpowered with dread he struggled to shout, for he was strangling; a dead, cold hand already clenched his throat, when he regained his voice in a shrieking "Help me!" and awoke. At that moment the window was burst in with such force that the pieces flew on to his bed. He sprang up; a man stood in the opening, around him smoke and tongues of fire.

"The house is burning, Lars, we'll help you out!"

It was Canute Aakre.

When again he recovered consciousness, he was lying out in a piercing wind that chilled his limbs. No one was by him; on the left he saw his burning house; around him grazed, bellowed, bleated, and neighed his stock; the sheep huddled together in a terrified flock; the furniture recklessly scattered: but, on looking around more carefully, he discovered somebody sitting on a knoll near him, weeping. It was his wife. He called her name. She started.

"The Lord Jesus be thanked that you live," she exclaimed, coming forward and seating herself, or rather falling down before him: "O God! O God! now we have enough of that railroad!"

"The railroad?" he asked: but ere he spoke, it had

flashed through his mind how it was; for, of course, the cause of the fire was the falling of sparks from the locomotive among the shavings by the new side-wall. He remained sitting, silent, and thoughtful; his wife dared say no more, but was trying to find clothes for him: the things with which she had covered him, as he lay unconscious, having fallen off. He received her attentions in silence, but as she crouched down to cover his feet, he laid a hand upon her head. She hid her face in his lap, and wept aloud. At last he had noticed her. Lars understood, and said: —

“You are the only friend I have.”

Although to hear these words had cost the house, no matter, they made her happy; she gathered courage and said, rising and looking submissively at him.

“That is because no one else understands you.”

Now again they talked of all that had transpired, or rather he remained silent, while she told about it. Canute Aakre had been first to perceive the fire, had awakened his people, sent the girls out through the Parish, while he himself hastened with men and horses to the spot where all were sleeping. He had taken charge of extinguishing the fire and saving the property; Lars himself he had dragged from the burning room and brought him here on the left, to the windward, — here, out on the churchyard.

While they were talking of all this, some one came driving rapidly up the road and turned off toward them; soon he alighted. It was Canute who had been home after his church-wagon; the one in which so many times they had ridden together to and from the Parish meetings. Now Lars must get in and ride home with him. They took each other by the hand, one sitting, the other standing.

“You must come with me now,” said Canute. With-

out reply Lars rose: they walked side by side to the wagon. Lars was helped in: Canute seated himself by his side. What they talked about as they rode, or afterward in the little chamber at Aakre, in which they remained until morning, has never been known; but from that day they were again inseparable.

As soon as disaster befalls a man, all seem to understand his worth. So the parish took upon themselves to rebuild Lars Hogstad's houses, larger and handsomer than any others in the valley. Again he became chairman, but with Canute Aakre at his side, and from that day all went well.





THE EAGLE'S NEST.

FROM THE NORWEGIAN OF BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON







THE EAGLE'S NEST.

ENDREGAARDEN was the name of a small solitary hamlet, surrounded by high mountains, from which flowed a broad river that divided the flat and fertile valley in two.

The river ran into a lake that lay close to the hamlet, and from this spot there was a beautiful prospect. Once there came a man rowing over Endre Water : his name was Endre, and it was he who had first settled in the valley, and his kindred who now lived there. Some said he had decamped hither for murder's sake, and it was therefore his descendants were so dark : others said it was due to the mountains, that shut out the sun at five o'clock on midsummer day.

Over this hamlet there hung an eagle's nest from the projecting cliffs up in the mountain ; and though all could see when the eagle was sitting, the nest was quite out of reach. The male bird sailed over the hamlet, pouncing now on a lamb, now on a kid : once he had also taken a little child and borne it away ; therefore there was no security so long as the eagle had her nest in this mountain fastness.

There was a tradition among the people, that, in the

olden time, two brothers had climbed up and destroyed the nest ; but now there was no one who could do it.

When two met in Endregaaarden, they would speak of the eagle's nest, and look up. Every one knew what time in the new year the eagles had come back, where they had pounced down and done mischief, and who had last attempted to climb up.

In the hope of one day being able to achieve the feat of the two brothers, the lads, from quite small boys, would practise themselves in climbing trees and cliffs, wrestling, &c.

At the time of which we now speak, the first lad in Endregaaarden was not of the Endre kin : his name was Leif, he had curly hair, and small eyes, was clever in all play, and fond of the gentler sex. He said very early of himself, that one day he would reach the eagle's nest ; but people intimated he had better not have said it aloud.

This tickled him, and, before he was of full age, he went aloft. It was a clear Sunday morning in the early summer : the young birds would scarcely be hatched. The people gathered in a crowd under the mountain to see ; old and young alike advising him against the attempt.

But he listened only to the voice of his own strong will, and, waiting till the eagle left her nest, he made one spring and hung in a tree several yards from the ground. It grew in a cleft, and up this cleft he began to climb. Small stones loosened from under his feet, and the soil and gravel came tumbling down ; otherwise it was quite still, save the sound of the river from behind, with its subdued and ceaseless sough.

He soon reached that part where the mountain began to project, and here he hung by one hand, groping with his foot for a hold : he could not see. Many, especially

women, turned away, saying he would not have done this if his parents had been living. At last he found a footing, sought again, first with the hand, then with the foot: he missed, slipped, then hung fast again. They who stood below could hear each other breathing.

Then a tall young girl, who sat upon a stone apart from the rest, rose up: they said she had promised herself to him from a child, although he was not of the Endre kin, and her parents would never give their consent. She stretched out her arms and called aloud, "Leif, Leif, why do you do this!" Every one turned towards her: the father stood close by and gave her a severe look, but she did not heed him. "Come down again, Leif," she cried: "I—I love you; and there's nothing to be gained up there!"

One could see that he was considering; he waited a moment or two, and then went further up. He found a firm footing, and for a time he got on well; then he seemed to grow tired, for he often stopped.

A small stone came rolling down, as though it were a forerunner, and all who stood there must watch its course to the bottom. Some could not bear it longer, and went away. The girl still standing high upon the stone, wrung her hands and gazed up. Leif took hold again with one hand; it slipped, she saw it distinctly; he made a grasp with the other; it slipped also. "Leif!" she cried, so that it rang in the mountain, and all the others joined in. "He's slipping!" they cried, and stretched out their hands towards him, men and women. He continued to slip with the sand, stone, and soil; slip, slip, faster, faster. The people turned away, and then they heard a rustling and rattling on the mountain behind them, and something heavy fall down like a great piece of wet earth. When they looked round again, there he lay, torn and

disfigured. The girl lay on the stone: the father took her up and carried her away.

The lads who had the most excited Leif to climb, dared not now go near to help him, some could not even look at him; so the old people had to come forward. The eldest of them said, as he took him up, "Alas! alas! but," he added, "it is well there is something hangs so high that every one cannot reach it."





THE FATHER.

FROM THE NORWEGIAN OF BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSEN.





THE FATHER.

THORD OVERAAS, of whom we are about to speak, was the wealthiest man in the parish.

His tall figure stood one day in the pastor's study: "I have got a son," he said eagerly, "and I wish to have him baptized."

"What shall he be called?"

"Finn, after my father."

"And his god-parents?"

They were named, being relatives of Thord, and the best men and women in the district.

"Is there any thing else?" asked the pastor, and looked up.

The farmer stood a minute.

"I should like to have him baptized by himself," he said.

"That is to say on a week day?"

"Next Saturday, at twelve o'clock."

"Is there any thing else?"

"Nothing else."

The farmer took his hat and moved to go.

Then the pastor rose: "There is still this," he said, and going up to Thord, he took his hand and looked

him in the face: "God grant that the child may be a blessing to you!"

Sixteen years after that day, Thord stood again in the pastor's study.

"You look exceedingly well, Thord," said the pastor: he saw no change in him.

"I have no trouble," replied Thord.

The pastor was silent, but a moment after: "What is your errand to-night?" he asked.

"I have come to-night about my son, who is to be confirmed to-morrow."

"He is a clever lad."

"I did not wish to pay the pastor, before I heard what number he would get. I hear that,—and here are ten dollars for the pastor."

"Is there any thing else?" asked the pastor, looking at Thord.

"Nothing else." Thord went.

Eight years more passed by, and so one day the pastor heard a noise without his door, for many men were there, and Thord first among them. The pastor looked up and recognized him.

"You come with a powerful escort to-night."

"I have come to request that the banns may be published for my son: he is to be married to Karen Storliden, daughter of Gudmund, who is here with me."

"That is to say, to the richest girl in the parish."

"They say so," replied the farmer, stroking his hair up with one hand.

The pastor sat a minute as in thought: he said nothing, but entered the names in his books, and the men wrote under.

Thord laid three dollars on the table.

"I should have only one," said the pastor.

"Know that perfectly, but he is my only child ; will do the thing well."

The pastor took up the money: "This is the third time now, Thord, that you stand here on your son's account."

"But now I am done with him," said Thord, and taking up his pocket-book, said good-night, and went. The men slowly followed.

Just a fortnight after this, the father and son were rowing over the lake in still weather to Storliden, to arrange about the wedding.

"The cushion is not straight," said the son: he rose up to put it right. At the same moment his foot slipped: he stretched out his arms, and with a cry fell into the water.

"Catch hold of the oar!" called the father: he stood up and stuck it out. But when the son had made a few attempts, he became stiff.

"Wait a minute!" cried the father, and began to row. Then the son turned backwards over, gazed earnestly at his father, and sank.

Thord could scarcely believe it to be true: he kept the boat still, and stared at the spot where his son had sunk, as though he would come up again. A few bubbles rose up, a few more, then one great one: it burst—and the sea again lay bright as a mirror.

For three days and three nights the father was seen to row round and round the spot without either food or sleep: he was seeking for his son. On the morning of the third day he found him, and carried him up over the hills to his farm.

It would be about a year after that day when the pastor, one autumn evening, heard something rustling outside the door in the passage, and fumbling about the lock.

The door opened, and in walked a tall, thin man, with bent figure and white hair. The pastor looked long at him before he recognized him: it was Thord.

"Do you come so late?" asked the pastor, and stood still before him.

"Why, yes, I do come late," said Thord: he seated himself. The pastor sat down also, as though waiting: there was a long silence.

Then said Thord, "I have something with me that I wish to give to the poor." He rose, laid some money on the table, and sat down again.

The pastor counted it: "It is a great deal of money," he said.

"It is the half of my farm, which I have sold to-day."

The pastor remained long sitting in silence: at last he asked, but gently: "What do you intend to do now?"

"Something better."

They sat there awhile, Thord with downcast eyes, the pastor with his raised to Thord. Then the pastor said slowly, and in a low tone: "I think at last your son has really become a blessing to you."

"Yes, I think so myself also," said Thord: he looked up, and two tears coursed slowly down his face.





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The Works of the New Norwegian Writer,

Björnstjerne Björnson.

ALREADY PUBLISHED :

ARNE.

THE HAPPY BOY.

THE RAILROAD AND THE CHURCHYARD.

NOTICES OF THE PRESS.

London Athenæum.

Björnstjerne Björnson is the name of a young writer whose works — a few short stories, some poems, and a dramatic work — have created an extraordinary sensation through Scandinavia. From an obscure publisher in a small town in the north of Norway, his book soon found its way to the right places; and when it came to the capital of Denmark, it caused equal pleasure and astonishment. The feeling between Denmark and Norway has, unfortunately, in later years been less cordial; and a sort of peevish, suspicious tone on the side of the Danes, and a boastful behavior on the part of the Norwegians, has not tended to strengthen the feeling of friendship. That a book written by a Norwegian, whose subjects, style, and dialect (the language generally spoken in Norway is Danish) so thoroughly represent his nation, should immediately have gained unquestionable praise from all Danes and Swedes, speaks strongly for its great intrinsic merit. But, after all, it is no wonder. We know of nothing more beautiful than some of these stories. What originality, purity, and simplicity! what poetry! His heroes are peasants, his heroines peasant girls; but how happy we feel in their society, how deeply interested in what they say and do! In style, these stories bear a slight resemblance to the old sagas: the characters described are so true to nature, so real, that you seem to feel their presence, and fancy them old acquaintances, after a few strokes of the pen. With M. Björnson a new era begins in Scandinavian literature. . . .

. . . We recommend "Arne" for the insight it gives into peasant life in Norway, and for the singularity and pathos of the narrative, which oblige the reader, when once he has taken it up, to read to the end.

The Independent.

In speaking specially of Björnson, I wish to make his books an exception to those titles which daily flame from the publishers' columns. He has stepped at once into a new place, and made it his own. Or, if it is not a new world into which we are introduced, we find the old one enveloped in a new atmosphere, and it assumes under his touch an almost fairy significance. It may be said that much of this freshness and simplicity come from the really little we know of Norway, and the latent power in a simple theme simply treated. I think something like this has been urged; but when you refer the genius of an author in this broad way to the choice treatment of a topic, you have rather asserted than explained it. Good

choice and happy execution are what define for us all excellence of which art or authorship is capable. I have spoken of Björnson as a story-teller; but he is a poet, too,—as much so as if he dealt directly with the accessories of verse. The little bursts of song which are scattered through "Arne" are well done, and very sweet in their place; but I do not include his lyrical quality in these. Carrying his art into prose, it is still poetic; and there is hardly a page in "Arne" and the "Happy Boy" that is not as perfect as if it were a summer idyl. . . "Arne" is as delicious a story as any fairy tale can be, or ever was. Without shirking the plain, prosaic conditions of genuine human life, it yet constantly appeals to our imagination,—as the June landscapes at sunset intimate the Fortunate Islands beyond. Its glimpses into nature are as true as Shakespeare's.

In forthright honesty of style he has set an example to his craft that the world could not thank him too much for, if there was any likelihood it would be followed. He knows how to say just enough, and make a few simple strokes in the picture tell. It has the ease of good writing throughout. He evidently confides in the reader's aptness, and believes he may leave many things to suggestion without risk. Hence, we find him always saying the right thing at the right time and in the right way, and leaving off when the chapter is done. The very first page of "The Happy Boy"—and of "Arne," too—affords a marked illustration of the pure sufficiency of a few words. The chapter of correspondence between Oeyvind, Marit, and the schoolmaster, is not only naïve and unique, but has a pathetic tenderness that almost moistens the eyes.

How long we shall continue to like stories like these, when their newness has worn off and their slender framework is exposed, I do not assume to say. But for the present they make a pleasant transition from the highly spiced literature so much in demand. Their simplicity and freshness, their delicate shading of color, abounding pathos, subtle insight of moods and character, and dainty reserve in expression, must win them, as fast as they become known, a welcome under many roofs. They are not for the old alone, nor merely for the young; they weave their spell around the whole family-circle.

In no way, too, and by no writer have the sanctities of religion been so tenderly expressed. Their presence saturates the very texture of "The Happy Boy," without the least impertinence of pietistic cant, and falls like a soothing benediction. The freedom and buoyancy of life, however, is nowhere checked; and Sunday relaxation, the social dance, and the cup of ale do not seem, in Norway at least, to interfere with the fullest duty to God and man.

The Nation.

One of Björnson's strong points is his skill in putting a landscape before us, not by "word-painting,"—though for that matter "word-painting" never puts a landscape before us,—but by a few happy sentences which serve as eyes, because they are the words of one with a strong love of nature; with an ability to see the picturesqueness of a scene as well as to feel the sentiment of it; with the ability, too, and the will, to choose descriptive words, and with an incapacity of performing the word-painter's trick of selecting fine phrases because they are fine. Touches of this power now and again occur in the "Fisher Maiden," but not so frequently as in "Arne." . . . It is not then for his power as a thinker that Björnson is to be admired. He is a lyrical poet. Capable of failing in drama, liable to seem weak when he attempts to take philosophical views of life, he is yet gifted with such a capacity of feeling, and he has so much of the poet's power to tell us with precision what moves his soul and appears to his vision, and so much of the artist's power of selection and self-restraint, that he takes his place among the most genuine and delightful of the minor poets of nature and of the affections.

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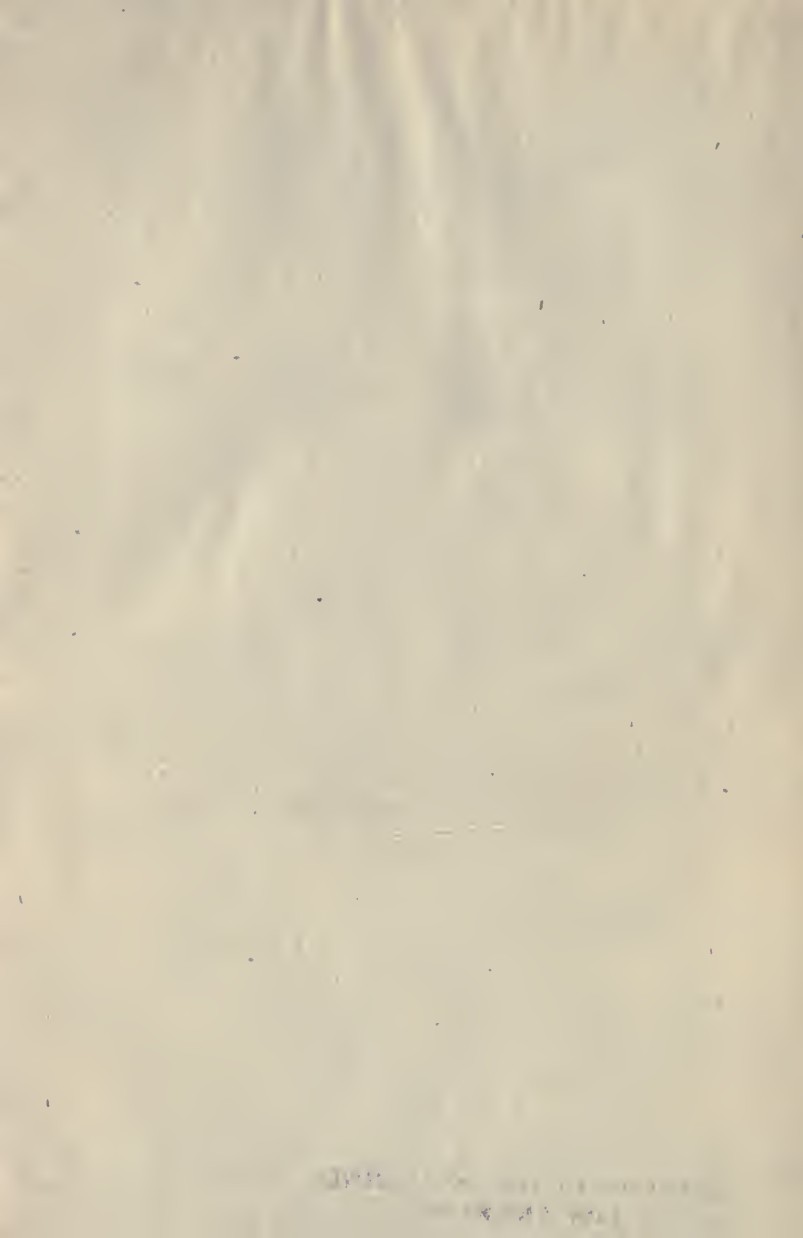
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